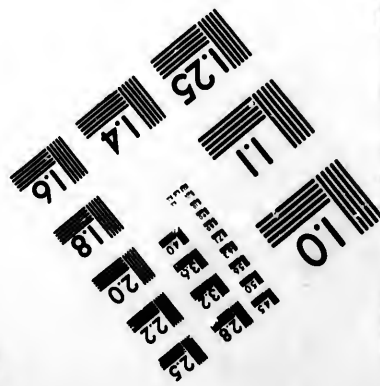
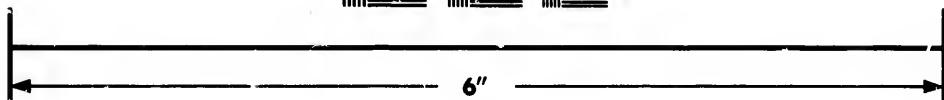
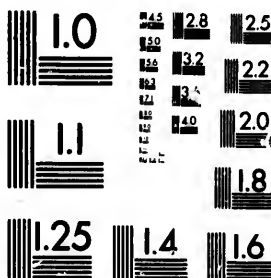


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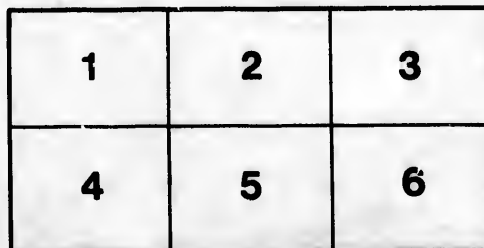
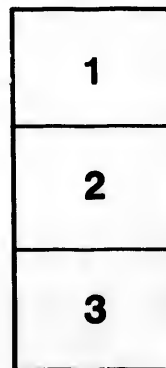
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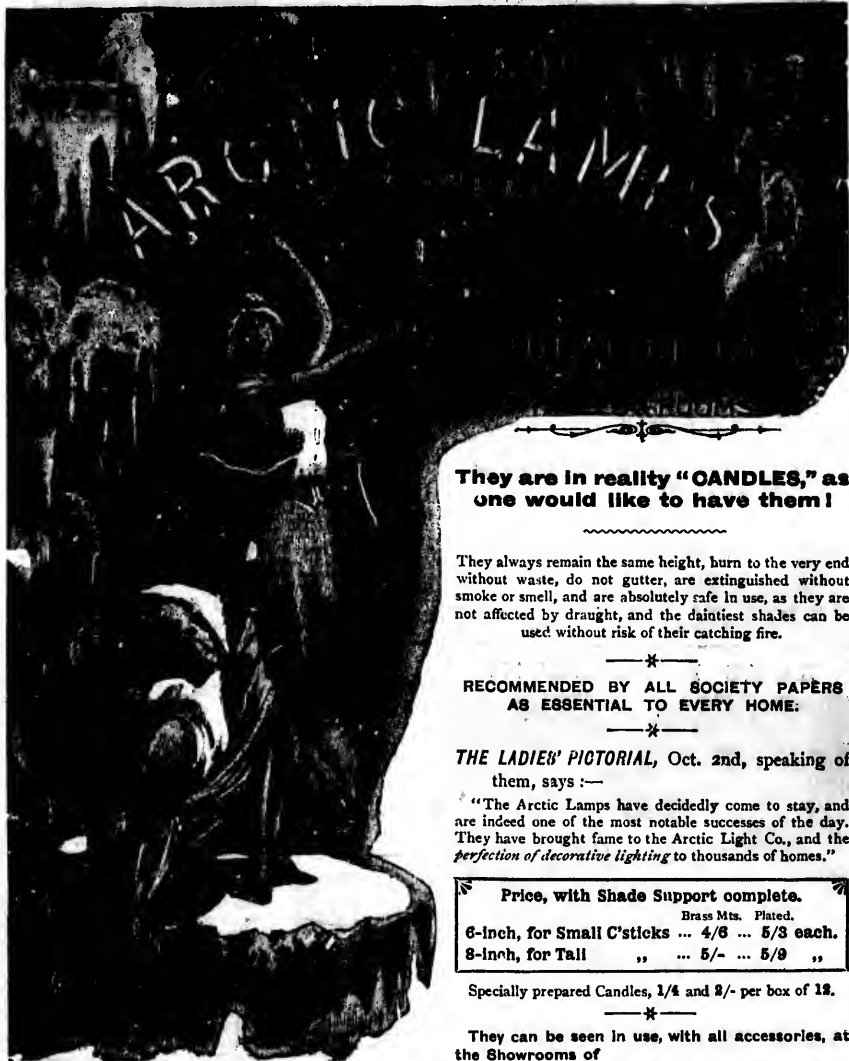
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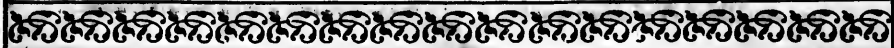
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"She flung her arms passionately round her husband's neck."

[Page 150.]



The Scallywag

By
Grant Allen

Illustrated by G. P. Jacomb-Hood

London
Ward, Lock & Co., Limited
New York and Melbourne

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THE SCALLYWAG.

CHAPTER I.

IN WINTER QUARTERS.

"For my part," said Armitage, "I call him a scallywag."

"What is a scallywag?" Nea Blair asked, looking up at him from her seat with inquiring wonder.

Armitage paused a moment, and perused his boots. It's so hard for a fellow to be pounced upon like that for a definition off-hand.

"Well, a scallywag," he answered, leaning his back, for moral support, against the big eucalyptus-tree beside which he stood, "a scallywag, I should say, well—well, is—why, he's the sort of man, you know, you wouldn't like to be seen walking down Piccadilly with."

"Oh, I see!" Nea exclaimed, with a bright little laugh. "You mean, if you were walking down Piccadilly yourself in a frock-coat and shiny tall hat, with an orchid from Bull's stuck in your button-hole! Then I think, Mr. Armitage, I rather like scallywags."

Madame Ceriolo brought her eyes (and eye-glasses) back from space, where they had been firmly fixed on a point in the heavens at an infinite distance, and ejaculated in mild and solemn surprise:

"But why, my dear Nea?"

"Oh, because, Madame, scallywags are always by far the most interesting people in the world. They're so much more likely to be original and amusing than all the rest of us. Artists and authors, for example, are almost always scallywags."

"What a gross libel on two liberal professions!" Armitage put in, with a shocked expression of face.

He dabbled in water-colours as an amateur himself, and therefore considered he was very nearly implicated in this wholesale condemnation of art and literature.

"As far as I'm concerned," Madame Ceriolo said with angelic softness, re-arranging her *pince-nez*, "I hate originality. And I'm not very fond of artists and authors. Why should people wish to be different from their fellow-Christians?"

"Who is it you're calling a scallywag, any way?" Isabel Boyton asked from her seat beyond with her clear American accent.

If Madame Ceriolo was going to start an abstract discussion on an ethical question of wide extent, Isabel meant, with Philadelphian practicality, to nail her down at once to the

matter in hand, and resolutely resist all attempts at digression.

"Why, this new man, Gascayne," Armitage drawled out in answer, annexing a vacant chair just abandoned by a fat old Frenchman in the background by the *café*, and seating himself opposite them.

"It's a good name—Gascayne," Nea suggested, quietly.

"Yes, indeed," Miss Boyton echoed, with American promptitude. "A first-rate name. I've read it in a history-book."

"But a good name doesn't count for much nowadays," Madame Ceriolo interposed, and then straightway repented her. Anybody can assume a good name, of course; but surely *she* was the last person on earth who ought to have called attention, just then, to the facility of the assumption. For did she not print a countess's coronet on the top of her own card on no better title? and was not her vogue in Rivierian Society entirely due to her personal assertion of her relationship to the Ceriolos of Castel Ceriolo, in the Austrian Tyrol?

"Well, he's a nice-looking young fellow enough," Nea added, pleading his cause with warmth, for she had committed herself to Mr. Gascayne's case now, and she was quite determined he should have an invitation.

"Besides, we're awfully short of gentlemen," Isabel Boyton put in sharply. "I haven't seen him, but a man's a man. I don't care whether he is a scallywag or not, I mean to go for him." And she jotted down the name on her list at once, without waiting to hear Madame Ceriolo for the prosecution.

It was seasonable weather at Mentone, for the 20th of December. The sky was as cloudlessly blue as July, and from the southern side of the date-palms on the Jardin Public, where they all sat basking in the warm rays of the sun, the great jagged peaks of the bare mountains in the rear showed distinct and hard against a deep sapphire background. A few hundred feet below the summit of one of the tallest and most rugged, the ruined walls of the Saracen fortress of Sant' Agnese just caught the light; and it was to that airy platform that Nea and Isabel proposed their joint picnic for the twenty-fourth—the day before Christmas. And the question under debate at that particular moment was simply this—who should be invited by the two founders of the feast? each alternately adding a name to her own list, according to fancy.

"Well, if you take Mr. Gascayne," Nea

said, with a faint air of disappointment at losing her guest, "I shall take Mr. Thistle-ton."

And she proceeded to inscribe him.

"But, Nea, my dear," Madame Ceriolo broke in with an admirable show of maternal solicitude, "who is Mr. Gascoyne, and who is Mr. Thistleton? I think we ought to make sure of that. I haven't even heard their names before. Are they in Society?"

"Oh, they're all right, I guess," Isabel Boyton answered briskly, looking up much amused. "Momma was talking to them on the promenade yesterday, and she says she apprehends Mr. Thistleton's got money, and Mr. Gascoyne's got brains if he ain't got family. They can just come right along. Don't you be afraid, Madame."

"Your momma's opinion is very reassuring, no doubt," Madame Ceriolo continued drily, as one who liked not the security, and in a voice that half mimicked Isabel's frank Americanism; "but still, as being in charge of dear Nea's conduct and society while she remains at Mentone, I should prefer to feel certain, before we commit ourselves to inviting them, exactly who these young men are. The fact that they're stopping at a decent hotel in the town is not in itself sufficient. Such very odd people get into good hotels on the Riviera sometimes."

And Madame Ceriolo, measuring Isabel through her eyeglasses with a stony stare, drew herself up with a poker-down-her-back air, in perfect imitation of the stereotyped British matronly exclusiveness.

The fact was, having accepted the post of chaperon-companion to Nea Blair for the winter, Madame Ceriolo was laudably avaricious to perform her part in that novel capacity with strict propriety and attention to detail; but, never having tried her hand at the proprieties in her life before, and being desirous now of observing them to the utmost letter of the law—if anything, she rather over-did it than otherwise.

"Now, Mr. Armitage," Nea said mischievously, "it's you who're responsible for our original introduction to the scallywag and his friend. Speak up for their antecedents! You've got to account for your acquaintances to Madame." And she drew a circle with her parasol on the gravel-path, as if to point the moral of the impossibilities of his ever escaping them.

"Well, to begin with, they're Oxford men," Armitage said, clearing his throat, and looking dubiously about him. "They're both of them Oxford men."

Madame Ceriolo's back relaxed somewhat. "Oh, Oxford men," she answered in an appeased voice. "That's always something." Then, after a pause, under her breath, to herself, "*Ja wohl, ja wohl! C'est toujours quelque chose.*"

It was part of Madame Ceriolo's point, in

fact, as a cosmopolitan and a woman of the world, that she always thought to herself in French or German, and translated aloud, as it were, into English. It called attention now and again in passing to what casual observers might otherwise have overlooked—her Tyrolese origin and her Parisian training.

"And Gascoyne, the scallywag," Armitage went on reflectively, "appears to be a sort of tutor or something of the kind to the other one—Thistleton."

Madame Ceriolo's back collapsed altogether.

"An Oxford tutor!" she cried, smiling most genially. "Why, that's quite respectable. The pink of propriety. *Tout ce qu'il y a de plus comme il faut!* Nothing could be more proper."

"I don't think he's exactly a tutor—not in the sense you mean," Armitage continued hastily, afraid of guaranteeing the scallywag too far. "I think he's merely come abroad for the vacation, you know, bringing this other young fellow along with him as a private pupil, to give him a few hours' reading and accompany him generally. I fancy he hasn't taken his own degree yet."

"Then they're both of them students still?" Isabel Boyton interjected. "Oh my! Ain't that nice! Two Oxford students! You always read in English books, you know, about students at Oxford."

Armitage smiled.

"We don't call them students at Oxford or Cambridge, though, for obvious reasons," he said, with British tolerance for Transatlantic ignorance; "we know too well what they go there for, Miss Boyton, for that. We call them undergraduates."

"Well, undergraduates, any way," Isabel answered good-humouredly. She was accustomed to snubbing. "It don't much matter what you call them, I guess, as long as they're men, and come from Oxford. Are you satisfied about them now in your own mind, Madame Ceriolo?"

Madame Ceriolo smiled her gracious little smile. She was as pretty and well preserved a woman of forty as you would wish to see across a *table d'hôte* at dinner any day.

"If they're really Oxford men, and your momma approves of them," she replied, with just the faintest little, undertone of malice. "I'm sure they'll be an acquisition to Mentone Society. Though I could wish that one of them was not a scallywag, if Mr. Armitage has explained the meaning of the name he applies to him correctly."

"Chut!" Armitage murmured in a gentle undertone. "Talk of the devil!—Here comes Thistleton!"

"We say in Austria, 'Speak of an angel, and you hear the rustle of her wings,'" Madame answered demurely. "*C'est plus poli, notre proverbe à nous; n'est-ce pas, monsieur?* And which is Thistleton? The pupil or the scallywag?"

"The pupil," Armitage whispered, in a flutter of uneasiness. "But take care—take care. He'll see we're talking of him."

"The pupil! *C'est bien!*" Madame mused in reply. And in effect it was well; for experience and analogy led her to conclude that the pupil is usually richer in this world's goods than his master or instructor.

"Though, after all," Madame reflected to herself wisely, "it isn't always the richest people, either, you can get most out of."

Her reflections, however, philosophical as they might be, were cut short by the arrival of the pupil himself, whom Armitage advanced to meet with friendly right hand, and presented duly to the ladies of the party.

"Madame Ceriolo, Miss Boyton, Miss Blair—Mr. Thistleton."

The new-comer bowed. He was a blonde young man, tall, hearty, and athletic, with a complexion indicative of serious attention to beefsteak for breakfast, and he wore a well-made knickerbocker suit that suggested unlimited credit at a West-end tailor's.

Madame Ceriolo cast her keen black eyes over him once from head to foot through those impassive glasses, and summed him up mentally at a glance to herself; manufacturing interest, rich, good-humoured, a fool with his money, strong, handsome, Britannic—the kind of young man, in fact, who, under other circumstances, it might have been well for a woman of the world to cultivate. But then, dear Nea! that excellent Mr. Blair; the Cornish rectory; her British respectability! Madame drew herself up once more at the thought and bowed stiffly.

"Now, Nea, say, he's yours; you've got to ask him," Isabel Boyton remarked, after the usual formalities of the weather report and the bill of health had been duly exchanged by either party. "The seal—" She checked herself; even Transatlantic freedom of speech has its final limits. "Mr. Gascocyne's mine, and Mr. Thistleton's yours, you know. So fire away, there's a dear. 'On Saturday next—the pleasure of your company.'"

"What is it?" the blonde young man asked, with a good-humoured smile. "Tennis, a hop, a dinner, a tea-fight?"

"Oh, dear no! only a picnic, Mr. Thistleton," Nea answered, blushing; a blush through that clear, rich, olive-dusky skin is so very becoming. "Miss Boyton and I are stopping together at the 'Hôtel des Rives d'Or,' and we've got up a little entertainment of our own—"

"With mamma and Madame Ceriolo," Isabel interposed promptly, to save the *convenances*.

"To Sant' Agnese on the hill-top there," Nea went on, without noticing the interruption. "It's on Saturday, the twenty-fourth, the day before Christmas. Are you and Mr. Gascocyne engaged for Saturday?"

"Now, you're asking *my* man, too," Isabel

put in, pretending to be vexed; "and I was going to write him such a sweetly pretty invitationalor.."

"We're not engaged, so far as I'm concerned," Thistleton answered, seating himself. "I shall be awfully delighted. But I'm not so sure about Gascocyne, Miss Blair. He's such a shy sort of fellow, he won't go out. However, I'll convey Miss Boyton's message to him."

"But the trouble is," Isabel said, glancing seaward, "that every man Jack of us is to go on a donkey."

"And this meeting cordially recognises the principle," Armitage put in from behind, "that every man Jack of us, as Miss Boyton so charmingly phrases it, is to engage, provide, hire, and pay for his own animal."

"Where's Sant' Agnese?" the blonde young man inquired, looking about him vaguely.

Armitage and Miss Boyton pointed it out together at once (of course in different places), and Armitage's, as a matter of fact, happened to be the right one. Such is the perversity of men, that they actually insist upon being usually accurate in these unimportant details.

"Why, I could hop that lot on one foot," Thistleton exclaimed, contemptuously. "I'll walk, Miss Blair; I don't need any donkey."

"But you don't understand," Armitage answered, smiling. "The point of this particular entertainment is that it's to be fundamentally and essentially an exclusive donkey-picnic."

"For which reason, Mr. Armitage, we've included you in it," Isabel remarked, parenthetically in a stage undertone.

Armitage severely ignored the cheap witticism. A man of culture can afford to ignore Pennsylvaniaian pleasantries.

"And it would mar the harmony of the entertainment," he continued, as bland as ever, "if any of us were to insist on going up on our natural organs of locomotion."

"Meaning our legs," Nea added, in explanation, for the blonde young man seemed helplessly involved in doubt as to Armitage's meaning.

Isabel Boyton glanced down at the ground with modest coyness.

"Limbs we say in Amurricia," she murmured, half-audibly to herself, with a rising blush.

"We are all vertebrate animals," Armitage responded, with cheerful ease. "Why seek to conceal the fact? Well, you see, Thistleton, the joke is just this: we shall start some ten or fifteen donkey-power strong, all in a row, to scale the virgin heights of Sant' Agnese—is 'virgin heights' permissible in America, Miss Boyton?—and if any one of us were ignobly to walk by the side, he'd be taking a mean advantage of all the remainder."

"In short, we mean to make ourselves ridiculous in a lot," Nea said, coming to the

rescue; "and none of us must be less ridiculous than the main body. You can't think what fun it is, Mr. Thistleton, and what a cavalcade we shall make, zigzagging up and down the mountain-side like so many billy-goats! Why, fat old Mrs. Newton at our hotel's going to come on purpose, if she can get any donkey in Mentone strong enough to carry her."

"The true philosopher," Armitage observed, sententiously, "is never deterred from doing that which suits his own convenience by the consideration that he is at the same time affording an innocent amusement to other people."

The blonde young man yielded with grace forthwith.

"Oh, if it's only a case of making myself ridiculous to please the company," he said, with native good humour, "I'm all there. It's my usual attitude. I accept the donkey and the invitation. When and where do we start? We must have a rendezvous."

"At the *gare* at ten sharp," Nea said, ticking him off on her list of the apprised. "And mind you order your donkeys well beforehand, for there'll be a brisk demand. Every donkey in Mentone'll be in requisition for the picnic."

Madame Ceriolo sighed. "What a character you're giving us!" she exclaimed lackadaisically. "But never mind, my child—*la jeunesse s'amusera.*"

And she looked as young and pretty herself when she smiled as a woman of forty can ever reasonably be expected to do.

CHAPTER II.

ROOM FOR THE HERO.

AN hour later the blonde young man pursued the even tenor of his way, assisted by a cigar and swinging a stout green orange-stick in his hand, along the Promenade du Midi, the main lounge of Mentone, towards the Hôtel Continental. Arrived at the grand staircase of the palatial caravanseraï, the most fashionable in the town, he leapt lightly up three steps at a time into the entrance-hall, and calling out, "Here, you, sir," in his native tongue—for he was no linguist—to the boy at the lift, mounted hydraulically, whistling as he went, to the second storey. There he burst into the neatly-furnished sitting-room, being a boisterous young man, most heedless of the conventions, and, flinging his hat on the table and himself into an easy chair before the superfluous fire, exclaimed in a loud and jolly voice to his companion:

"I say, Gascoyne, here's games to the fore! I've got an invitation for you."

His friend looked up inquiringly. "Who from?" he asked, laying down his pen and rising from his desk to sun himself in the broad flood of light by the window.

"A pretty American," Thistleton answered,

knocking off his ash into the basket of olive-wood; "no end of a stunner!"

"But I don't know her," Paul Gascoyne gasped out, with a half-terrified look.

"So much the better," his companion retorted, imperturbably. "If a lady falls over head and ears in love with you merely from seeing your manly form in the street without ever having so much as exchanged a single word with you, the compliment's a higher one, of course, than if she waited to learn all your virtues and accomplishments in the ordinary manner."

"Dinner?" Gascoyne asked, with a dubious glance towards his bedroom door. He was thinking how far his evening apparel would carry him unaided.

"No, not dinner; a picnic next Saturday as ever was," Thistleton replied, all unconscious. "The ladies of the 'Rives d'Or' invite us both to lunch with them on the green up yonder at Sant' Agnese. It's an awful lark, and the pretty American's dying to see you. She says she's heard so much about you—"

"A picnic!" Paul interposed, cutting him short at once, and distinctly relieved by learning of this lesser evil. "Well, I daresay I can let it run to a picnic. That won't dip into much. But how did the ladies at the 'Rives d'Or' ever come at all to cognise my humble existence?"

Thistleton smiled an abstruse smile.

"Why, Armitage told them, I suppose," he answered, carelessly. "But do you really imagine, at the present time of day, my dear fellow, every girl in the place doesn't know at once the name, antecedents, position, and prospects, of every young man of marriageable age that by any chance comes into it? Do you think they haven't spotted the fashionable intelligence that two real live Oxford men are stopping at the 'Continental'? I should rather say so! Gascoyne, my boy, keep your eyes open. We've our price in the world. Mind you always remember it!"

Paul Gascoyne smiled uneasily. "I wish I could think so," he murmured half aloud.

"Yes, we've our price in the world," his friend continued slowly, cigar turned downwards and lips pursed, musing. "The eligible young man is fast becoming an extinct animal. The supply by no means equals the demand. And the result's as usual. We're at a premium in Society, and, as economic units, we must govern ourselves accordingly."

"Ah, that's all very well for rich men like you," Paul began, hurriedly.

"What! do you mean to say," Thistleton cried, rising and fronting him with a jerk, "that half the women one meets wouldn't be glad to marry the son and heir of a British bar—"

Before he could utter the word that was gurgling in his throat, however, Gascoyne had clapped his hand upon that imprudent mouth, and cried out, in a perfect agony of disgust:

"No more of that nonsense, for heaven's

sake, Thistleton! I hope you haven't breathed a word about it to anybody here in Mentone? If you have, I think I shall die of shame. I'll take the very next train back to Paris, I swear, and never come near either you or the place again as long as I live."

Thistleton sat down, red-faced, but sobered. "Honour bright, not a word!" he answered, gazing hard at his companion. "I've never so much as even alluded to it. The golden-haired Pennsylvanian was trying to pump me all she knew, I confess; but I listened not to the voice of the charmer, charmed she never so wisely through her neat little nose. I resisted the siren like bricks, and kept my own counsel. Now, don't cut up rusty about it, there's a good, sensible fellow. If a man's father does happen to be born——"

But a darted look from Gascoyne cut him short once more with unspoken remonstrance, and he contented himself with pulling down his collar and flashing his shirt-cuffs to imitate in pantomime a general air of close connection with the British aristocracy.

There was a short pause, during which Thistleton slowly puffed his cigar, while Paul looked out of the window in meditative mood and scanned the blue bay and purple sea, with Bordighera shining white on its promontory in the distance.

It would have been impossible for anybody to deny, as you saw him then, that Paul Gascoyne was essentially a scallywag. He looked the character to perfection. It wasn't merely that his coat, though carefully brushed and conserved, had seen long service and honourable scars; it wasn't merely that his tie was narrow, and his collar *démodé*, and his trousers baggy, and his shoes antique: it wasn't merely that honest poverty peeped out of every fold and crease in his threadbare raiment; the man himself had something of that shy and shrinking air which belongs by nature to those poor souls who slink along timidly through the back alleys of life, and fear to tread with a free and open footstep the main highways of respectable humanity. Not that, on the other hand, there was anything mean or small in Paul Gascoyne's face or bearing; on the contrary, he looked every inch a man, and, to those who can see below the surface, a gentleman also. He was tall and well-built, with handsome features and copious black hair, that showed off his fine eyes and high white forehead to great advantage. But the day of small things had weighed upon him heavily: the iron of poverty and ancestral care had entered into his soul. The sordid shifts and petty subterfuges of a life far harder than that of his companions and fellow-students had left their mark deep upon his form and features. He was, in short, what Armitage had called him, in spite of his good looks—an obvious scallywag, nothing more or less: a person rightly or wrongly conscious that, by accident or demerit, he fills a minor

place in the world's esteem and the world's consideration.

He stood and gazed out of the window abstractedly, reflecting to himself that, after all, a climb up those glorious gray crags to Sant' Agnese would be far from unpleasant, even though clogged by a golden-haired Pennsylvanian, no doubt wealthy, if only—when suddenly Thistleton recalled him to himself by adding in an afterthought:

"And we've got to order our donkeys early; for donkeys, too, will be at a premium on Saturday. Political economy very much to the front. Supply and demand again unequally balanced."

Paul glanced up at the silent rocks once more—great lonely tors that seemed to pierce the blue with their gigantic *aiguilles*—and answered quietly:

"I think I shall walk, for my own part, Thistleton. It can't be more than a couple of thousand feet or so up, and half a dozen miles across country as the crow flies. Just about enough to give one an appetite for one's lunch when one gets there."

"Ah, but the pretty American's commands are absolute—every man Jack to ride his own donkey. They say it's such fun going up in a body like so many fools; and if everybody's going to make himself a fool for once, I don't object to bearing my part in it." And the blonde young man leaned back in his easy-chair and stuck his boots on the fender with a tolerant air of perfect contentment with all mankind and the constitution of the universe.

"I shall walk," Paul murmured again, not dogmatically, but as one who wishes to settle a question off-hand.

"Look here, now, Gascoyne, 'this is clean rideeklous,' as the Highland meenister said in his prayer. Do you mean to say you're too grand to ride a donkey? You think it *infra dig*. for a B. of B. K.—there, will that suit you?—to be seen on a beast which is quite good enough——"

Paul cut him short once more with a gesture of impatience.

"It's unkind of you, Thistleton," he said, "to go on harping so often on that threadbare string, when you see how very much pain and annoyance it causes me. You know it's not that. Heaven knows I'm not proud—not that way, at least—what on earth have I got to be ashamed of? No, the simple truth is, if you must have it, I don't want to go to the expense of a donkey."

"My dear fellow! Why, it's only five francs for the whole day, they tell me!"

Paul Gascoyne smiled. "But five francs is a consideration to me," he answered, after a slight mental reckoning. "Fifty pence, you see; that's four and twopence. Four and twopence is an awful lot of money to fling away for nothing!" And he rearranged the logs on the fire reflectively.

"Well, look here, Gascoyne, sooner than

mar the harmony of the meeting, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll stand you a donkey."

Paul gave a little start of surprise and uneasiness. His colour deepened. "Oh, no," he said. "Thistleton, I couldn't allow that. If I go at all, I shall go on my own legs, or else take a beast and pay my own expenses."

"Who's proud now?" the blonde young man exclaimed, with provoking good humour.

Paul looked down at him gravely from the corner of the mantelpiece on which his aria rested.

"Thistleton," he said, in a serious voice, growing redder still in the face as he spoke, "to tell you the truth, I'm ashamed already of how much I'm letting you do for me. When I first arranged to come abroad with you, and have my expenses paid, I hadn't the remotest conception, I assure you, of what an awful sum the expenses would come to. I've never lived at a hotel like this before, or in anything like such extravagant luxury. I bought the ten pounds I charged for tuition would be the chief item; instead of which, I see now, you've already paid almost as much as that for me in railway fares and so forth, and I tremble to think how much more you may have to pay for my board and lodging. I can't let you stand me my amusements, too, into the bargain."

The blonde young man puffed away at his cigar for a moment or so with vigorous good humour.

"What a devil of a conscience you've got!" he observed, at last, in the intervals of the puffs; "and what a devil of a touchy sense of honour as well, Gascoyne! I suppose it's in the family! Why, it's the regular rule; if you take a vacation tutor to a place of your own choice abroad, you pay his way for him. I call it only fair. You contract to do it. There's no obligation on either side. A mere matter of business."

"But you come to such a grand hotel and live so royally!" Paul objected, with fervour.

"Am I to go to a cabaret and live upon garlic, just to suit your peculiar views of expenditure?" Thistleton retorted, with spirit.

"Can I drink sour wine and eat black bread because you like to be economical? No, no, my dear fellow. You mistake the position. I want to come to Mentone for the winter. Beastly climate, Yorkshire; dull hole, the governor's; lovely coast, the Riviera; Monte Carlo always laid on at a convenient distance; lots of amusement; plenty of fun; the very place to spend the Christmas vac. in. If I go and say to the governor: 'Look here, old boy, I want a pony or two to run down South and amuse myself, just to escape this infernal dull hole of yours, and to have a turn or two at roulette or something,' why the governor 'd no doubt advise me to go and be hanged, in language more remarkable for force than elegance. Very well, then; what do I do? I go to him and say, pulling a long face, 'Look

here, sir, I want to read up for my next examination. Devilish clever fellow at my own college—studious, steady, economical—excellent testimonials—all that sort of thing. Sure to come out a first in "Greats" next time. I propose to read with him at some quiet place in the South of France—say Mentone, suppressing the little detail about Monte Carlo, you understand; 'he'll go for a tenner and his own expenses.' What's the result? The governor's delighted. Fishes out his purse—stumps up liberally. Claps me on the back, and says, 'Charlie, my boy, I'm gratified to see you're turning over a new leaf at last, and mean to read hard, and get through with credit.' And that's the real use, you see, of a vacation tutor."

Paul listened somewhat aghast to this candid explanation of his own true function in the modern commonwealth; then he answered slowly:

"It's rather hard lines on the governor, I fancy. But I suppose I can't interfere with that. Your arrangements with your father are your own business, of course. As to myself, though, I always feel a little uneasy. It may be all right, but I'm not accustomed to such a magnificent scale of expenditure, and I don't want to put either you or him to any unnecessary expense in the matter of my living."

Thistleton threw back his head once more on the easy-chair, and mused aloud:

"What a conscience! what a conscience! I believe you wouldn't spend an extra sixpence you could possibly save if your life depended upon it."

"You forget," Paul cried, "that I have special claims upon me."

The peculiar stress he laid upon that emphatic word "claims" might have struck anybody less easy-going than Charlie Thistleton, but the blonde young man let it escape his attention.

"Oh, I know what you mean!" he retorted carelessly. "I've heard that sort of thing from lots of other fellows before. Slender means—the governor poor—heavy expenses of college life—home demands—a mother and sisters."

"I wish to heaven it was only that," Paul ejaculated fervently. "A mother and sisters I could easily put up with. But the claims upon me are far more serious. It's a duty I owe to somebody else not to spend a single penny I can help, unnecessarily."

"By Jove!" the blonde young man exclaimed, waking up. "Not engaged? Or married?"

"Engaged! Married! No, no. Is it likely?" Paul cried, somewhat bitterly.

"The golden-haired Pennsylvanian's a jolly good investment, I should say," Thistleton went on meditatively. "Rolling in coin. A mint of money. She'll be really annoyed, too, if you don't come to her picnic, and, what's more, ride a donkey."

"Is she rich?" Paul asked, with sudden and unexpected interest, as if a thought had instantly darted across his brain.

"Rich! Like Croesus, so Armitage tells me. Rich as Pactolus. Rich as wedding-cake. Rich beyond the wudest dreams of avarice."

Paul moved from his piace at the corner of the mantel-piece, fiery red in the face now, and strolled as carelessly as he could across the room to the window. Then he opened his purse, counted the money furtively, and made a short mental calculation, unobserved. At the end of it he gave a very deep sigh, and answered aloud, with a wrench:

"Well, I suppose I ought to go. It's a precious hard pull; for I hate this sort of thing; but, then, I have claims—very special claims upon me."

"Still, you'll go, anyhow?" Thistleton asked once more.

"Yes, I'll go," Paul answered, with the air of a man who makes up his mind to have a tooth drawn.

"And you'll ride a donkey?"

"I suppose I must, if the golden-haired Pennsylvanian absolutely insists upon it. Anything on earth where duty calls one."

And he sank, wearied, into the chair by the window.

CHAPTER III.

AL FRESCO

SATURDAY dawned as lovely a morning as the founders of the feast could possibly have wished it. It was a day to order. Not a touch of mistral embittered the air. The sea shone liquid blue, with scarcely a ripple dimpling its surface; the great gray peaks loomed clear and distinct in hard outline against a solid blue firmament. It is only on the Riviera that you get that perfect definiteness and contrast of colour. Everything looked sharp as in an early Italian picture, with an early Italian sky of uniform hue to throw up and intensify the infinite jags and tatters of the mountain profile.

At ten sharp the first arrivals began to greet one another with shouts of derision on the road by the station. Thistleton and Gascoyne were among the earliest on the scene. Punctuality, the blonde young man remarked, was one of his companion's most hopeless failings. As they trotted up upon their mettlesome steeds—Paul's more mettlesome, in fact, than was either seemly or agreeable—they found Armitage with four ladies in tow drawn up in a hollow square to receive them. Boys with the provisions stood expectant at the side, and Paul noticed with a distinct tinge of awe that from one of the baskets several necks of bottles protruded, wired and tied, and covered with gold or silver tissue. Then the picnic would actually run to champagne! What unbridled

luxury! The golden-haired Pennsylvanian must, indeed, as Thistleton had declared, be rich as Pactolus!

A stern sense of duty induced Paul to look around the group for that interesting personage. Unaccustomed to Society as he was, and in the awkward position of being introduced from the back of a restive donkey, he was at first aware merely of a fiery heat in his own red face and a confused blurr of four perfectly unabashed and smiling ladies. Four names fell simultaneously on his unheeding ear, of the sound of which he caught absolutely nothing but the vague sense that one was Madame Somebody, and that two of the rest were Miss Whatsername and her momma. A clear sharp voice first roused him to something like definite consciousness. "Mr. Gascoyne's my guest, Nea," it said, in a full and rich American accent, which Paul had hardly ever before heard, "and Mr. Thistleton's yours. Mr. Gascoyne, you've just got to come and ride up right alongside of me. And I'll trouble you to look after the basket with the wine in it."

So this was the golden-haired Pennsylvanian! Paul glanced at her shyly, as who meets his fate, and answered with what courage he could summon up, "I'll do my best to take care of it, but I hope I'm not responsible for breakages."

The lady in the deer-stalker hat beyond—not the Pennsylvanian—turned to him with a quietly reassuring smile. "What a glorious day we've got for our picnic!" she said, flooding him with the light of two dark hazel eyes; "and what splendid fun it'll be going all that way up on donkeys, won't it?"

For those hazel eyes and that sunny smile Paul would have sworn himself before any court of justice in all England with infinite pleasure. As a matter of fact, he disliked donkey-riding—he, who could clear a fence with any man in Oxford—but he answered sinfully (and I hope the recording angel omitted to notice the transgression), "Nothing could be more delightful; and with such lovely views too! The look-out from the summit must be something too charming for anything." After which unwonted outburst of Society talk, lost in admiration of his own brilliancy, he relapsed once more into attentive silence.

Nea Blair had never, indeed, looked more beautiful. The tailor-made dress and the unstudied hat suited her simple, girlish beauty to a T. Paul thought with a sigh how happy he could have been had the call of duty led him thither, instead of towards the service of the golden-haired Pennsylvanian.

One after another the remaining guests struggled up piecemeal; and when all were gathered together—a quarter of an hour behind time, of course—for they were mostly ladies—the little cavalcade got itself under way, and began to mount the long steep stairs that lead from the Borrigo valley to the scarped hog's

back which separates the Val des Châtaigniers from the Val des Primevères. To Paul, in spite of the eccentricities of his mount, that first expedition into those glorious mountains was one of almost unmixed delight. As they threaded their way in long, single file across the wooded col that divided the ravines, he looked down with surprise and pleasure into the gracious deep gorges on either side, each traversed by the silver thread of torrent, and reflected to himself with a sigh of pleasure that he had never known the world was so beautiful.

"Oh my! ain't it just lovely?" Miss Boyton called out to him from behind, for he was sandwiched in between her and Nea Blair; "and ain't they jest elegant, the lemon-trees in the valley there!"

"Which are the lemons?" Paul asked, half dubious, for the ravine was filled with trees and shrubs, whose very names he knew not.

"Why, the awfully green trees on the terraces down below," Isabel Boyton answered, a little offhandedly.

"And the silvery grey?" Paul inquired, with some hesitation. "Are they olives, I wonder?"

"Of course they're olives," the American answered, with some little asperity. "I guess you've never been along this way before, Mr. Gascogne, have you?"

"It's the first time in my life I've ever been out of England," Paul answered, humbly; "and everything is so strange, I find I've a great deal to learn all at once—to learn and to remember."

"But the olives are lovely, aren't they?" Nea Blair remarked, turning round upon him with that sunny smile of hers for a moment. "Lovelier even than your own willows round about Iffley, I think—if anything on earth can be lovelier than dear old Oxford."

"Then you know Oxford?" Paul exclaimed, brightening up at once.

"Oh, yes; I had a brother a few years ago at Oriel. And I know Mrs. Douglas, the wife of the Professor."

"I wish I'd had a brother at Oxford College," Miss Boyton put in parenthetically, urging on her donkey; "I'd have made him take me along and introduce me to all his aristocratic acquaintances. I mean some day to marry one of your English noblemen. I've made up my mind to catch an earl, and be Lady Isabel Something."

"But you couldn't be Lady Isabel by marrying an earl," Paul answered, smiling a very curious smile. "In that case, of course, you'd be a countess."

"Well, a duke, then," Miss Boyton answered, imperturbably, "or a marquis, or a viscount, or whatever other sort of nobleman was necessary to make me into Lady Isabel."

Paul smiled again.

"But none of them," he said, "could make you Lady Isabel. You'd be Lady Somebody,

you know—Lady Jones, for example, or Lady Smith, or Lady Cholmondeley."

"Or Lady Gascogne; that sounds jest lovely," Miss Boyton interposed, with an air of perfect simplicity.

Paul started at the sound, and scanned her close. His ears tingled. Was she really as innocent and harmless as she looked, or had it somehow come round to her?—but oh, no! impossible!

"Yes," he went on, quietly, without noticing the interruption; "but you must be born a duke's or an earl's or marquis's daughter, to be called Lady Isabel."

Miss Boyton's countenance fell not a little.

"Is that so?" she exclaimed, plaintively. "You don't tell, really! Then I can't be Lady Isabel, no matter who I married?"

"No matter whom you married," Paul answered, with the stern precision of Lindley Murray and a British Peerage in equal proportions.

"Well, now, if that ain't jest too bad!" Isabel Boyton exclaimed, with deep mock pathos. "Say, Nea, Mr. Gascogne's crushed the dream of my life. I don't care a cent to be Lady Somebody if I can't be Lady Isabel. And I can't be Lady Isabel, whoever I marry. I call it jest heartrending."

"Won't an honourable or a courtesy-lord do as well?" Nea asked, laughing.

"Oh! my, no!" Isabel answered promptly; though what manner of wild-beast a courtesy-lord might be she hadn't the faintest conception. "I'd most as soon go back to Philadelphia again, returned empty, and marry a stock-broker. I've made up my mind to be Lady Isabel or nothing."

"Then I'm afraid," Paul said with a faint little smile, "I can do nothing for you."

"But if it were only to make her plain 'My Lady,' now!" Nea put in laughingly.

Paul laughed in return—an uneasy laugh. They had just reached one of the sudden steep ascents where the sure-footed little donkeys, straining every nerve and muscle in their stout, small legs, climb up the bare rocks like mountain goats, with their human burdens jerking in the saddles like so many meal-bags.

"How the little beasts grimp!" Paul cried, half surprised; "such plucky little creatures, and so strong for their size! They're really wonderful!"

"That's a good word—'grimp,'" Nea answered from in front. "Is it pucker English, I wonder?"

"I do admire it," Isabel Boyton replied from behind. "Here, get up, donkey. My Arab steed don't carry me regularly."

Just at that moment a loud cry of '*Ach Himmel!*' resounded from the forefront of the cavalcade, where Madame Ceriolo led the way—Madame Ceriolo, even in the most trying circumstances, never forgot to keep up her French and German—followed next instant by a sharp "*Mon Dieu! quelle*

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" Paul and Armitage followed more slowly at a little distance." [Page 23.

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affreuse petite hôte!" and the shambling, scrambling noise of a fallen donkey endeavouring to recover itself.

Paul and Armitage were at her side in a moment, to pick up Madame Ceriolo and her unhappy mount. Madame made the most noise, but Blanchette, the donkey, had received of far the most injury. The poor little beast's knees were cut and bleeding.

"*Je l'ai couronnée, la méchante,*" Madame said carelessly, and Paul saw at a glance it would be quite unable to continue the journey.

It's an ill wind, however, that blows nobody good. Paul seized the opportunity to effect a double stroke of business—to do a politeness to Madame Ceriolo and to get rid of the onus of his own donkey. Almost before she could have a voice in the matter, or any other man of the party equally gallant or equally uncomfortable could anticipate him, he had shifted the side-saddle from poor, patient, shivering, broken-kneed Blanchette, and transferred it forthwith to the bigger beast he himself had been riding.

"*Merci, monsieur, merci; mille remerciements,*" Madame cried, all smiles, as soon as she had recovered her equanimity and her company manners. "And you, you little brute," turning to poor Blanchetto and shaking her wee gloved fist angrily in its face, "you deserve to be whipped, to be soundly whipped, for your nasty temper."

"The poor creature couldn't help it," Paul murmured quietly, tightening the girths; "the road's very steep and very slippery, you can see. I don't wonder they sometimes come an awful cropper!"

"By Jove!" Armitage said, watching him as he fastened the buckles and bands, "what a dab you are at donkeys, really, Gascoyne! You do it like a groom! you've missed your vocation."

Paul coloured up to the roots of his hair.

"I've been used to horses," he answered quietly. Then he turned back without another word to take his place on foot beside Nea Blair and Isabel. "Here, boy," he called out to one of the drivers quickly, "hand me that basket: I'll take it on; and go down to Mentone with this poor little beast. She'll need looking after."

He spoke in French fluently, and Nea turned in surprise.

"Why, you said you had never been abroad before!" she exclaimed, taken aback. "And now you talk like a regular *boulevardier*. Were you born Parisian, or did you acquire it by a miracle?"

"I've had great opportunities of talking French at home," Paul answered, a little embarrassed. "We—a—we always had a French-woman in the family when I was a child."

"A governess?" Nea suggested.

"Well, no. Not exactly a governess."

"A *bonne*, then?"

"No, not quite a *bonne*, either," Paul

replied truthfully. Then, a happy thought seizing him on the moment, he continued, with truth, "She was a lady's-maid."

After that he relapsed into silence for a while, feeling painfully conscious in his own mind that his subterfuge was a snobbish one. For though he only meant, himself, to evade a difficulty, he saw at once that Nea Blair would understand him to mean a lady's-maid of his mother's. And as to the possibility of his mother having ever possessed that ornamental adjunct—why, the bare idea of it was simply ridiculous.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SANT' AGNESE.

ONCE restored to the free use of his own two legs, Paul Gascoyne was himself again. As the one member of the party, except the donkey-boys, who went afoot, he was here, there, and everywhere, in waiting upon everybody. What prodigies of valour did he not perform in hauling fat old Mrs. Newton's donkey up the steepest bits, or in slipping down round the sharpest corners to help Nea Blair safely round some difficult gully! What useful services did he not lavish on the golden-haired Pennsylvanian and her shrivelled mamma, walking by their sides where the ledges were narrowest, and calming their fears where the rocks towards the slope were loosest and most landslippy! How he darted from the rear up short-cuts of the zig-zags, and appeared in front again, a hundred yards ahead, on some isolated boulder, to encourage and direct their doubtful footsteps! How he scrambled over inaccessible faces of cliff to fetch some fern or flower for Nea, or to answer some abstract question as to the ultimate destination of the minor side-paths from Isabel Boyton! He was a good climber, and he enjoyed the climb—though he feared for his old boots and his carefully-conserved trousers.

The road was long—Sant' Agnese stands some three thousand feet above sea-level—but at every turn the views grew lovelier, and the sense of elation in the mountain air more distinct and delicious. They passed from the region of olives into the zone of pine woods, and then again into that of bare white rock, scarcely terraced here and there by Provençal industry to support a few stunted vines and undersized chestnut trees. The path wound slowly up the sides of the stony ravine, and then mounted in a series of sharp elbows the sheer peak itself, to an accompaniment of cries of Franco-German distress from Madame Ceriolo and shrill Transatlantic exclamations of horror from the golden-haired Pennsylvanian. At last they reached the goal of their pilgrimage—a rocky platform high up the last peaks of the jagged mountain, with a gray Ligurian village just clinging to the slopes, and almost

indistinguishable from the still grayer wall of bare rock that rose above it in sharp tors and weather-worn chimneys against the deep blue heaven.

"What a glorious view!" Nea Blair exclaimed, as they looked down unexpectedly on the northern side into a profound and naked basin of rock, at whose bottom the Borrijo torrent roared and brawled amid its scattered boulders. "And what magnificent great peaks away across the valley there!"

"I guess we'd better fix up lunch on that flat piece by the chapel," Isabel Boyton remarked with Occidental practicability, spying out forthwith the one patch of tolerably level ground within reach of the village. It was a spur of the mountain, covered with that rare object in the Provengal Alps, a carpet of turf, and projecting from the main range far into the semicircle of the deep rock-basin.

"We'll fix it up right away," Madame Ceriolo answered with good-natured mimicry. Madame Ceriolo had the natural talent for languages which seems to go inseparably with the rôle of Continental adventuress, and she spoke American almost as well and with almost as good an accent as she spoke her other alternative tongues. "If your mamma and Mrs. Newton 'll set themselves down right here, and make themselves comfortable, Mr. Gascoyne and I will jest unpack the baskets. Come along here, Nea, we want you to help us. Miss Boyton, you get the plates and things ready, will you?"

For a few minutes they were busy arranging everything, Armitage, the blonde young man, and Paul rendering all due assistance; and Paul was aware in an indefinite way that Madame Ceriolo was somehow anxious to keep him off as much as possible from the golden-haired Pennsylvanian. But as this gave him the opportunity of conversing more with Nea, and as, duty to the contrary notwithstanding, he very much preferred Nea to the heiress of Pæctolus, he by no means resented Madame's obvious anxiety in this respect. On the contrary, he salved his conscience with the reflection that it was Madame rather than inclination that kept him away from the lady of the golden hair and prospects.

Such a picnic as that December morning's Paul had never before borne a part in. There were dishes from Rumpelmayer's, cunningly compounded of aspic and olives, whose very names he had not so much as heard, but whereof the rest of the party, more instructed in cookery, talked quite glibly. There were curious salads, and garnishings of crayfish, and candied fruits and pastry and nougat of artistic manufacture. There was much champagne, and vintage clarets, and *Asti mousseux* for those who liked it sweet, and green chartreuse poured from a Cantagalli bottle. For though the picnic was nominally a joint affair of Nea's and the American's, it was Isabel Boyton who contributed the lion's share of the

material provision, which she insisted upon doing with true Western magnificence. The lunch was so good, indeed, that even the beauties of nature went unnoticed by comparison. They had hardly time to look at the glimpse of calm blue sea disclosed between the ridges of serrated peaks, the green braking valleys that smiled a couple of thousand feet below, with their orange and lemon groves, or the flood of sunshine that poured in full force upon the mouldering battlements of the grim and wasted Alps in front of them.

After lunch, however, Paul somehow found himself seated on the slope of the hill with Nea. They had discussed many things—Mentons and the view, and the flowers, and the village—and Nea had just told him the strange old legend of the castle that clings to the topmost peak—how it was founded by a Saracen, who levied tax and toll on all the Christian folk of the country round, and finally became converted to the faith of Europe by the beautiful eyes of a peasant-girl, whose charms had enslaved him, when suddenly she came back plump to the nineteenth century with the point-blank question: "Where do you live when you're at home, Mr. Gascoyne?"

"In Surrey," Paul answered vaguely, growing uncomfortably hot.

"Surrey's a big address," Nea Blair answered, pulling a tiny rock-rose from a cranny in the precipice. "Any particular part—or do you occupy the county generally?"

Paul laughed, but not with quite a gracious laugh. "About twenty-five miles from London," he answered, with evasive vagueness.

"I've lots of friends in Surrey," Nea went on innocently, unconscious of the mental pangs she was carelessly inflicting on him. "Do you know Hillborough?"

"Why, that's just where I live," Paul answered, with a suppressed start.

"Dear me; how funny I haven't met you!" Nea exclaimed in surprise. "I'm always down at Hillborough stopping with the Hamiltons."

"Indeed!" Paul responded in a very dry voice.

"You *must* know the Hamiltons," Nea persisted, all innocence. "Sir Arthur Hamilton, of the Grange, at Hillborough. He used to be Governor of Madras, you know, or somewhere."

"I know them by name, of course," Paul admitted uneasily.

"But not personally?"

"No, not personally. We—a—we move in different circles."

"Then you *must* know the Boyd-Galloways," Nea went on interrogatively.

"Only by sight. I haven't any large acquaintance at Hillborough."

"The Jacksons?"

"Colonel Jackson I sometimes see, it's true;

but I don't know him. They're—they're not the kind of set I mix with."

"Well, of course you know the rector?" Nea exclaimed, naming him. "The dear old Archdeacon—he's so nice with everybody."

"He comes to us occasionally," Paul answered with some reluctance. Then, after a pause, he added, lest he should seem to be claiming too great an honour: "But much more often he sends the curate."

Even yet Nea failed to take in the situation, not because she was slow of understanding, but because it was quite a novel one to her. "Perhaps you live alone?" she suggested in explanation.

Paul could put off the damning truth no longer.

"On the contrary," he said; "my father and mother live, and have always lived, entirely at Hillborough. But they're not in a position to see much of the local Society—in fact, they're not in Society in any way. We're quite poor people—what your friend, Mr. Armitage, to use a favourite word of his, would call scallywags."

There was an awkward pause. Then Nea said again, with a becoming blush:

"Forgive my pressing you. It—it never occurred to me." Next moment feminine tact induced her to change the subject not too abruptly. "I visit a good deal at Hillborough myself, and I thought we'd be sure to have acquaintances in common. But I live in Cornwall. Have you ever been in Cornwall, Mr. Gascoyne? In summer it's almost as beautiful as this; it is, really."

"No, I've never been there," Paul answered, grateful to her for the clever diversion. "But I shall hope to go," he added quite seriously.

"Oh, you must, when I get back again there next summer," Nea cried most warmly. "It's so awfully lovely. As soon as I'm well I shall long to get home again."

"You're not here for your health?" Paul inquired, catching her up.

"For my health? Yes. But it isn't serious. Not my lungs, you know," for Paul had laid his hand instinctively on his chest. "Only to recover from the effects of an upset in a boat last summer. I've no mother, and papa couldn't bring me abroad himself, because of leaving his parish; so he got Madame Ceriolo to take care of me. She's accustomed to travelling—Madame Ceriolo."

"Where on earth did he pick her up?" Paul inquired with some curiosity, for, inexperienced in the ways of the world as he was, Madame Ceriolo's personality had already struck him as a sufficiently singular one for her present occupation.

"Oh, he heard of her from a governess's agency," Nea answered with much confidence. "She had excellent testimonials from people of title. She's well connected. And she's a good little thing enough when you really get to know her."

"I dare say," Paul answered in that dubious tone which means, "I don't think so, but I wouldn't be rude enough to contradict you."

What Nea said next he didn't catch, for his ear was that moment distracted by a side conversation carried on at some little distance, between Armitage and old Mrs. Newton. They were talking low, but, in spite of their low tones, he overheard more than once the vague murmur of his own name; and that man were surely more than mortal whom the sound of his own name overheard in his neighbours' talk would not draw away even from a pretty girl's unimportant *causerie*. He listened without pretending to hear, and put in "yes," and "no," to Nea's remarks *à tort et à travers*. "Only one family of Gascoynes with a 'y' and without a 'g,'" Mrs. Newton was observing, "and that's the baronet's. Old Sir Emery Gascoyne, the last of the lot, was very rich, and lived down in Pembrokeshire—in Little England beyond Wales, as they call it locally. But this young man can't be one of *those* Gascoynes, because—" and there her voice sank still lower. Paul strained his ears, but could hear no more. "So very odd, wasn't it?" Nea was saying appealingly.

"Extremely odd," Paul assented like a man, though to what particular proposition he was thus boldly committing himself he really hadn't the faintest idea; but, as Miss Blair said so, he had very little doubt it must have been positively ludicrous.

"I stopped there once, at Gascoyne Manor," Armitage was saying once more, when next a scrap of the conversation was wafted towards him:

"It was in old Sir Emery's time, you know, before the present man came into possession. The present man's *not* a baronet, I fancy; ah, no, exactly so; that's just as I thought; but he's very rich, and will be lord-lieutenant of the county some day, I'm told. A splendid place, and awfully well kept up. No sort of connection, you may be pretty sure, with young Thistleton's tutor."

Paul's ears were tingling hot by this time, and it was with difficulty that he so far roused himself as to understand, when Nea said, "Shall we start at once, then?" that she had just been proposing a climb to the castle ruins, and that he had unconsciously promised to accompany her on her scramble.

"Certainly," he said, coming back with a start; and they rose at once, Madame Ceriolo rising too to fulfil to the letter her appropriate functions as contracted and paid for.

"Come," she said, "Mr. Thistleton," with her most girlish smile—and she looked seventeen when she meant to captivate—"come and give me a hand over these dreadful rocks. *Mon Dieu! quels rochers!* I shall stumble and fall I know, if I haven't one of the lords of creation to lean upon."

As they passed through the dark and vaulted alleys of the quaint old town—mere filthy

mole-tracks, built round on either side, and strengthened with vaults thrown across from house to house for greater stability in times of earthquakes—Nea glanced up quickly at the gloomy old roofs, and exclaimed with a gay ease:

"Oh, isn't it picturesque! I should just love to sketch it."

"Very picturesque," Paul answered, looking down at the noisome small gutters under foot, where barefooted children scrambled and crawled among the accumulated dirt of five-and-twenty centuries, "but very terrible, too, when you come to think that men and women live all their life in it."

"Oh, they're accustomed to it," Nea replied, lightly, with the easy-going optimism of youth and of the comfortable classes. "They've never known anything better, I suppose, and they don't feel the want of it."

"Miss Blair," Paul said, turning round and facing her suddenly and quite unexpectedly, "that sentiment's unworthy of you. You're only saying, of course, what everybody else says; but we expect something better from you than from everybody. Look at the misery and dirt in which these people live, and if contentedly, then so much the more terrible. Discontent is the only spur to improvement. If they're satisfied to live as they do, then they're so much the less human, and so much the more like the beasts that perish. Look how here, on this breezy, open hill-top, among these glorious rocks, their houses are built without sun or air, turned only to the filthy, festering street, and away from the light and the sea and the mountains. They don't care for the view, you say. Their views about views are, no doubt, rudimentary. But isn't it just that that's the saddest thing of all—that where they might enjoy so much fresh air, and sunshine, and health, and beauty, they're content with such gloom, and dirt, and misery, and squalor? You talk like that because you hardly think any class but your own is wholly human. I know better. I know that, up and down, high and low, gentle or simple, all the world over, there's a deal of human nature in men and women. And it seems to me a terribly painful thing that they should live like this—so painful as to spoil, to my mind, the very sense of picturesqueness in all this picturesque dirt and wretchedness!"

He turned round upon her so sharply, and his words flowed so quick, in such a spontaneous outburst of natural eloquence, that Nea Blair was fairly taken by surprise.

"You're right, I know," she answered, in a very low voice. "I spoke unthinkingly. I was only saying, as you say, what everyone else says. In future, Mr. Gascoyne, I shall remember to think of it and speak of it more seriously."

Paul blushed in return. He felt he had allowed his natural indignation to carry him away too hastily and unreservedly.

Two hours later, as he came back alone from the "Hôtel des Rives d'Or," whither he had gone to see his hostess home, he reflected, with some pang of remorse to himself, that he had, perhaps, done wrong in paying so much attention to Miss Blair and so comparatively little to the American heiress. Gold, gold! he should have gone for gold! It was wrong of him, no doubt—extremely wrong, with those heavy claims upon him. But then, how very nice Miss Blair was, and how thoroughly he detested this hateful worship of the golden calf and the golden image! If only his lot had been framed otherwise! Marry for money—the hateful idea! How much a man must sacrifice to the sense of duty!

On the table of the *salon* he found a letter awaiting him, with the Hillborough postmark. The handwriting on the envelope was boldly commercial. He tore it open. It was brief and succinct. And this was what he read in it:

"MY DEAR PAUL,

"I ought to have written to you before you left Oxford, to say that now as you are going abroad it would be a great pity—in case you get thrown into good society—to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar, as the common saying is. The time is now coming when we may begin to expect to pull off our *coup*, as the sporting gentlemen call it. Don't go singing small, as you're too much inclined to do. Let them know who you are, and take your proper position. At the same time, don't spend too much, and don't get dragged into unnecessary expenses. But keep up your dignity. For this purpose I enclose a ten-pound note, for which kindly sign note-of-hand herewith, as usual. The noble bart. and his lady are well and hearty, and send their respects.

"Your obedient servant,

"JUDAH P. SOLOMONS."

Paul laid down the letter with a sigh of relief. It was a comfort, at any rate, to know he had not done wrong in paying five francs for the beast which, as luck would have it, he had never ridden. He entered it without one qualm of conscience on his accounts: "Donkey for picnic, 4s. 2d." The item might pass. If Mr. Solomons approved, his mind was easy.

CHAPTER V.

GOSSIP.

"I THINK, for my part," Nea said decisively, enforcing her remark with a dig of her parasol into the gravel walk, "the scallywag's much the nicer of the two. But then, you know, I always did like scallywags. They've got so much more humanity and reality about them than—than most other people."

They were seated once more, the morning

after the picnic, on the Promenade du Midi, very stiff from their ride, and full of mutual notes of last night's entertainment.

Madame Ceriolo smiled her conventional smile, as she replied obliquely:

"And yet the other one—*je ne me rappelle plus son nom*—oh yes. Mr. Thistleton: he's very agreeable too, and probably, I should say, an excellent *parti*."

"Oh, he ain't much," Isabel Boyton answered with Yankee directness. "He's a lot too like a piece of putty for me. Of course, he's a fine big boy, and pretty nice to look at; but there's nothing in him. I'm down on mind, I am, and the scallywag's got three times as much of that as Mr. Thistleton."

"He's clever, I think," Nea assented, with a nod.

"Oh, you needn't talk, Nea," the American put in with a mock-injured air. "I call it real mean, the way you walked off with my young man that I'd invited on purpose for my own amusement, and left me to talk half the day to that pappy, sappy, vappy, big Englishman, with no more conversation in his six feet six than a ship's figurehead. It was just downright ugly of her, wasn't it, momma?"

Mrs. Boyton was a dried-up old lady of the mummified American order—there are two classes of American old ladies: the plentiful and the very skimpy—who seldom contributed much to the interchange of thought, save when her daughter called upon her to confirm her own opinion; and she murmured now dutifully:

"If you asked him for yourself, Izzy, you'd a right to his attentions; but, perhaps, he most thrust himself upon Miss Blair."

"He was very kind and attentive to us all," Nea answered. "In fact, he did more than anybody else to make everything go off smoothly."

"I can't find out who the dickens he is, though," Armitage broke in with a sigh. He was an old *habitué* of the Riviera, and had imbibed all the true Rivieran love for scandal-mongering and inquisitiveness. "He beats me quite. I never was so utterly nonplussed in all my life. I've tried my hardest to draw him out, but I can get nothing out of him. He shifts, and evades, and prevaricates, and holds his tongue. He won't be pumped, however skillfully you work the handle."

And Armitage flung himself back in a despairing attitude.

Nea smiled.

"That's not unnatural," she remarked in parenthesis.

"The worst of it is, though, the other fellow's just as reticent as he is," Armitage went on, unheeding her. "Not about himself, I don't mean—that's all plain sailing: Thistleton *père's* a master cutler at Sheffield, who manufactures razors by appointment to Her Majesty (odd implements for Her Majesty!) and is as rich as they make them—but about this

man Gascoyne, whom you call 'the scallywag—'"

"Oh, say!" Isabel Boyton interposed frankly, "if that ain't real good now! It was you yourself that taught us the word—we innocent lambs had never even heard of it—and now you want to go and father it upon us!"

"Well, anyhow, Gascoyne seems to have put Thistleton up to it to keep all dark, for when I tried to pump him about his tutor he shuts his big mouth, and looks sheepishly foolish, and can't be got to say a single word about him."

"What was that Mrs. Newton was saying to you yesterday about there being a Sir Somebody Gascoyne somewhere down in South Wales?" Madame Ceriolo asked with languid interest.

For a foreigner, born and bred abroad, Madame Ceriolo's acquaintance with English life and English topography was certainly something quite surprising. But then, you see, her dear mamma, as she was careful always to explain to strangers, was English born—the daughter of a dean and niece of a viscount. Very well connected person on every side, little Madame Ceriolo! And a dean is such a capital card to play in Society.

"Oh, there was a Sir Emery Gascoyne at Gascoyne Manor, down near Haverfordwest," Armitage explained glibly; "a very rich old gentleman of sensitive tastes and peculiar opinions. I stopped there once when I was an undergraduate. Splendid old place—Elizabethan house—delightful park—square miles of pheasants; but ill-tempered, very. If this young fellow's related to *him*—his next-of-kin, heir-at-law, executor, assign, and so forth—now's your chance, Miss Boyton, to pick up that English title I heard you say yesterday you'd set your susceptible American hear upon."

The golden-haired Pennsylvanian smiled resignedly. "It can never—never—never be Lady Isabel," she observed with pathos. "And yet I feel somehow like running a coronet."

"I don't think Mr. Gascoyne can be in any way connected with these Pembrokeshire people," Nea Blair put in, without the slightest intention of contributing at all to the general gossip. "He told me his family lived in Surrey—and," she added, after a moment's faint hesitation, "he implied they were by no means either rich or distinguished."

"In Surrey? Where—where?" urged a general chorus, in which Armitage's voice and Madame Ceriolo's were by far the most conspicuous.

"I don't know whether I ought to say," Nea answered simply. "I dragged it out of him rather, and he told me in confidence."

"Oh, if its got to telling you things in confidence already," Armitage retorted with a meaning smile, "I wouldn't for worlds dream of enquiring any further into the matter. Eh, Madame Ceriolo. What do you think about it?"

Thus goaded to a reply, Nea answered at once, with a very red face. "It wasn't so very much in confidence as all that comes to. He lives at Hillborough."

"Hillborough," Armitage repeated with a very abstruse air. "Then that'll exactly do. A friend of mine's a vicar near Hillborough—the very next parish, in fact, a place called Hipsley, and I'll write and ask him this very day all about the mysterious stranger. For when a man possesses a social mystery, its a sort of duty one owes to Society to turn him inside out and unravel him entirely. Fellows have no right to set us double acrostics in their own persons, and then omit to supply the solution."

"Here they come," Madame Ceriolo cried. "The two Oxonians! You'll have an opportunity now to try your hand again at him."

Armitage's eye glanced like a setter's on the trail of the quarry.

"I'll have one more try, at any rate," he said, with an air of virtuous resolution; "his birth shall no longer be 'wropped in mystery,' like Jeames de la Pluche's. He shall tell us all. He shall be forced against his will to confess his secret."

The blonde young man approached them carelessly.

"Morning, Armitage," he said, with an easy nod. Then he lifted his hat, "Good-morning, Madame Ceriolo. Miss Boyton, I hope your mamma's not overtired this morning."

"We're all too stiff to do anything on earth but sit still and scandalise," the pretty American answered, with pert fluency. "We were scandalising you two when you hove in sight round the next block. I guess you must have felt your ears tingle."

Paul felt his tingling at that precise moment.

"What were you saying about us?" he inquired, eagerly.

Miss Boyton made a graceful and lady-like, though faint, variation on a common gesture of street-boy derision.

"Wouldn't you jest like to know?" she responded, saucily. "You can't tell what things we've all been hearing about you."

"You can hardly have heard much that was true," Paul retorted, with some annoyance. "Nobody here at Mentone knows anything of my family."

"What, have you no friends here?" Madame Ceriolo inquired, astonished. "How very odd! I thought everybody knocked up against somebody they knew in Mentone. The world's so absurdly small nowadays." And she sighed feelingly.

Paul hesitated.

"Only one lady," he answered, after a brief pause. "A friend of my mother's. And I'm sure you haven't any of you met her, or else she'd have told me so."

"Are you all of you game for a brisk walk to Cap Martin?" Thistleton put in abruptly, with a jerk of his thumb in the direction

indicated. "We must do something to work off the effects of that infernal jolting."

"Bar the swear-word, I quite coincide," Isabel Boyton answered.

"The rest of us are too tired, I think," Madame Ceriolo yawned, gazing around her affectedly, and darting a very meaning glance at Armitage.

"I'll go," that inquiring soul responded promptly, catching on to it, as Miss Boyton afterwards observed, like a detective to the traces of a supposed forger.

"You won't come, Nea?" the American asked, as she rose to go.

"I don't think I can," Nea answered hurriedly, looking down at her feet; "I don't feel up to it." As a matter of fact, nothing on earth would have pleased her better; but she didn't like to walk with Paul after Armitage's insinuations that he had been quick in taking her into his youthful confidence.

"Well, let's start at once, then," the blonde young man remarked, cheerfully; he was always as cheerful as health and wealth and good humour can make one. "We've got no time to lose, I expect, if we mean to walk out to the point and back before lunch-time."

As they turned to set out, a woman passed them very unobtrusively; a Frenchwoman, as it seemed, neatly, but by no means fashionably dressed, and carrying in her hand a small market basket. She looked at Paul very hard as she went by, but had evidently not the least intention of recognising him. The young man, however, gazed at her for a moment in obvious doubt; then something within him seemed to get the better of him. He raised his hat, and said, "*Bon jour, Mademoiselle,*" with marked politeness.

"*Bon jour, Monsieur Paul,*" the Frenchwoman answered, with a respectful smile, evidently pleased at his recognition. And they both passed on upon their respective errands.

But as soon as they were gone, Madame Ceriolo put up her tortoiseshell eyeglass—the eyeglass she reserved for her most insolent stares—and regarded the unobtrusive Frenchwoman from a distance with a prolonged scrutiny. "Nea," she said, turning round to her charge with the air of one who has made a profound discovery, "did you take it all in, *cette petite comédie-la*? How simple! How comical! How charmingly idyllic! He didn't know whether to bow to her or not, in such good company; but at the last moment he was afraid to cut her. Poor little simpleton! How very fresh of him! This is evidently the lady who was his mother's friend, I suppose. She would have saved him the exposure if she could. But he hadn't the tact or the good sense to perceive it."

"He was quite right to bow," Nea answered, growing hot, "whoever she may be; and I respect him all the more for it."

"But do you know who she is?" Madame

persisted, all overflowing with suppressed amusement.

"No, I don't," Nea answered; "and it doesn't much matter."

Madame braced herself up, like a British matron compelled to announce a most shocking truth. "She's a lady's-maid with a family at the 'Iles Britanniques,'" she answered, shortly.

There was a brief pause after the explosion, in the course of which Nea and Isabel Boyton's mamma each digested by degrees this startling item of information. Then Nea murmured aloud once more:

"I always did and always shall like scallywags. I'm glad Mr. Gascoyne wasn't ashamed to acknowledge "

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMON PUMP IN ACTION.

THE square party of pedestrians turned away along the sea front, and then, taking the main road towards Nice, struck off for the basking, olive-coloured promontory of Cap Martin. Thistleton led the way with the Pennsylvanian heiress; Paul and Armitage followed more slowly at a little distance. Isabel Boyton had arranged this order of malice preposse; for she was a mischievous girl, like most of her countrywomen, and, though not inquisitive enough herself to assist in the process of pumping Paul, she was by no means averse to see that application of social hydraulics put into practice for the general benefit by a third person.

"Queer sort of body, that little Madame Ceriolo," Armitage began as soon as they were well out of earshot. He was one of that large class of people who can seldom talk about anything on earth except some other human being. Personalities largely outweigh generalities in their conversation. With all the world to choose from, with sun, moon, and stars, and heavenly bodies, sea and land and air and ether, stone and soil and plant and animal, history and science and arts and letters, to form the text of a possible talk, they can find nothing to discuss except some petty detail in the trivial life of some other fellow-creature. That Mrs. Jones has quarrelled with Mrs. Brown, or that Smith has been blackballed at the Cheyne Row Club, seems to them a far more important and interesting fact than an eruption of Vesuvius or a cataclysm at St. Petersburg.

"She seems good natured," Paul answered, without profoundly gauging the depths of the subject. It was the most charitable thing he could find in his heart to say about her.

"Oh, good natured enough, no doubt!" Armitage went on, confidentially; "but what a curious person for a man of the world to think of entrusting the care of his daughter to."

"Perhaps Mr. Blair's not a man of the world," the younger speaker replied, with rare

secrecy for his age. "Country parsons are often very simple-minded people."

"He must be precious simple-minded if he took the Ceriolo for anything but what she is," Armitage continued, sneering. "A brazen-faced specimen of the cosmopolitan adventuress, if ever there was one. But how clever, too—how immensely clever! 'Pon my soul, I admire her ingenuity. Having accepted a situation as guardian of the morals of an English young lady, she rises to the full height of her post with astonishing success and astonishing dignity. Her simulation of virtue's something quite sublime in its own way. Why, you'd hardly believe it; I attempted to flirt with her in the mildest possible manner—I, who am the discreetest and least compromising of mankind, a mountain of prudence—and the British indignation and icy coldness with which she repelled my gentle advances was truly edifying. No Belgravian mamma that ever lived could have done it more beautifully."

"Perhaps she didn't care for you," Paul suggested dryly. "Even a born flirt doesn't want to flirt with everybody indiscriminately."

"Perhaps that may be it," Armitage echoed, somewhat crestfallen. He was over thirty, and he took it ill that a young fellow barely of age as yet should thus calmly snub his pretensions to the rôle of lady-killer. "But, at any rate, her respectability is beyond reproach. Being cast for her part by pure force of circumstances, she accepts the situation and plays it to perfection."

"She's quite right to respect Miss Blair's youth and innocence," Paul answered quietly. "As far as that goes, I think all the better of her for it. Even if she is an adventuress, as you say, she's bound, as things stand, to do the very best she can for her present employer."

"Oh, of course, of course! You speak like a book, a nice little Sunday-school book, with a picture on the cover. But from the other point of view, you know, the thing's so ludicrous. Her careful assumption of the highest morality's so transparently absurd. Whenever she delivers herself of one of her little copybook platitudes, I always feel inclined to put my tongue in my cheek and wink gently. There's no doubt about it, though, she's devilish clever. She can talk every blessed European language with equal ease. She seems, like the famous *prima donna* in the story, to have swindled in every civilized country of the world—and also in Germany."

Paul smiled.

"Her French is certainly admirable," he said. "Her accent's so good. She speaks like a Parisian."

Armitage darted a hasty glance at him sideways. So that fellow pretended to be a judge on French accent, did he? That was certainly remarkable. A scallywag on accent!

"But her English, too," he persisted once

more; "what's still odder is her English. She rolls her r's a little, to be sure, and she slurs her th's; that's only natural; but what admirable fluency and what perfect command she has of even our slang and our stock quotations! She can pun and jest and bandy chaff in English, French, Italian, and German. She can bully a cabman or browbeat a landlord in ten languages. If her name's really Ceriolo, which Heaven only knows, the way she's learnt English alone is something to my mind truly miraculous."

"Her mother was English, she says," Paul suggested in his simplicity. "A clergyman's daughter, she told me—a Dean Something or other."

The older hand laughed at him to his face.

"Do you really mean to say," he cried, with an amused air, "you believe all that? Oh, what charming simplicity! Why, you might as well believe in the Countess's coronet and the family legend and the late lamented Count who was killed at the head of his noble troop of Austrian sympathizers by an infuriated Turk in the war in Servia. No, no, my dear fellow. Don't you see how cleverly all that's been arranged? Madame has to deal with a respected papa who happens to be an English clergyman. Whatever or whoever the Ceriolo may be, she thoroughly understands our English Philistinism and our English prejudices. The respected papa won't entrust his precious budding daughter to anybody who's not a highly respectable married woman and a member of the Church of England as by law established. Very well, then; we can easily manage that for you; Madame's mamma was an English lady—Anglican, of course—yes, and clerical too—a Dean's daughter; and Madame herself, though born at the ancestral Schloss in the Austrian Tyrol, was brought up by agreement in her mother's religion. Could anything be simpler, more natural, or more convincing? And how very well planned! French and German, with the Paris accent and the Viennese culture, and yet all the advantages of an English lady's care and the precise and particular type of Christendom exactly adapted to the needs and requirements of a country clergyman's daughter! By George, she's deep—extremely deep! But if it were a Frenchman of clerical sympathies she had to deal with, I bet you she'd be a Parisian and a fervent Catholic. Not too *dévoté*, you know, nor austere rigorous, but as Catholic as a *dame du monde* ought to be."

Paul shifted a little uncomfortably in his pea-jacket. This cynic had clearly devoted all his energies to the study and comprehension of his fellow-creatures, and he read them, it seemed, a trifle too easily. In such a man's hands, who was safe for a moment? Paul was afraid what the fellow might screw and worm out of him.

"The funniest thing of all," Armitage went on after a short pause, "is that she speaks all

languages well, but none exactly like a born native. Her English is splendid, but her r's and th's are a trifle German. Her French is good, but her *us* and her *eus* are a trifle English. Her German's prodigious, but her *ch's* and her final *g's* are scarcely Hanoverian. And she can't talk in any one of those languages for five minutes at a stretch without helping herself out now and again quite naturally by a word from another."

"Perhaps," Paul said, "she lived as a child in all three countries."

"Perhaps so," Armitage repeated; "but there's no evidence. However, I mean in any case to clear up her history. I was writing last night to a friend of mine, a parson, who knows Mr. Blair; he's the Vicar of Hipsley, near Hillborough in Surrey"—he eyed his man close to see the effect upon him—"and I've asked him to find out all he can about her."

"Indeed!" Paul said, never showing surprise by a muscle of his face. "I wonder you care to take so much pains about so unimportant a piece of intelligence."

"Oh, for the girl's sake, don't you know!" Armitage added hastily. "Of course she's hardly a proper person to have charge of a young lady alone on the Continent. Besides, one naturally likes to know what sort of company one's committing one's self to, doesn't one?"

"I don't think it much matters, as long as as they're decent people," Paul answered evasively.

"Ah, but that's just the question at issue," Armitage went on, trying another tack. "My man at Hillborough will hunt it all up. He's a capital hand at tracking people down. He ought to have been a detective. By the way, I fancy I heard Miss Blair say you came yourself from somewhere near Hillborough."

"I come from Hillborough town," Paul answered shortly.

"Then you know Rimington, of course."

"No; I've never met him."

"Dear me, how odd! He's vicar at Hipsley. And he's so very much *répandu*, as the French say. Spread about at every tea-fight and lunch and garden-party for twenty miles everywhere round Hillborough."

"Yes?"

"Yes, really. You *must* have seen him. Though perhaps you took him for a layman or a trainer's assistant. A bulldoggy-looking parson—a regular slogger, with a taste for loud tweeds and a most unclerical necktie."

"Oh, I know him well by sight," Paul answered in haste; "I only meant I'd never spoken to him."

Armitage altered the venue once more. "I've been down in that part of the world myself," he went on reflectively, "and I don't remember to have met any Gascoynes there."

"Most likely not," Paul answered with energy.

"You spell your name like the Pembroke-shire people," his persecutor went on. "It's a very rare way. Do you happen to be related to them?"

Thus brought to bay, Paul answered "Yes" with a very great effort, and then relapsed into silence.

But Armitage was not going to let him off so cheap. "You don't mean to say so!" he exclaimed with real interest, for the scent was growing very warm now. "Then what relation are you to the present baronet?"

There was no escape from it any longer. Paul gasped for breath. "Mr. Armitage," he said, turning suddenly upon him like a hunted creature at bay, "you've no right to question a stranger like this. My private affairs are my private affairs. I refuse to answer. I decline to say what relation I am to the present Sir Emery."

He slipped out the words without weighing them well. Armitage leapt upon them with the true joy of the chase. "The present Sir Emery!" he exclaimed with much irony, "why, that's a queer thing to say! You must be very ill-informed as to the history of your own family, it seems, Gascoyne. I should be sorry to pit my information against yours, but I was under the impression, shared, I believe, by Society at large, that the late Sir Emery was the last of the name, and that the property in Pembrokeshire had gone to a distant cousin, who's not a baronet at all, Mrs. Newton tells me."

No man can stand having his veracity impugned by such an obvious innuendo of falsehood as that. Paul Gascoyne drew a deep breath once more and answered warmly, "There you have been misinformed. It's not my business to set you right. You can correct your mistake by looking in a peerage. But if you *must* know, the present baronet is my father, Sir Emery Gascoyne, and he lives at Hillborough!"

Armitage gazed at the flushed young face and angry eyes in blank astonishment. Apparently, the fellow believed what he said; but how absurd, how incredible! This scallywag the heir of the Gascoyne baronetcy and the Pembrokeshire estates! What blunder could he have made? What error of identity? What mistake of fact? What confusion of persons?

However, being a very politic young man, and having now obtained all the information he wanted or was likely to get, he hastened to answer, in his most soothing tones, "Dear me! I must have been misinformed. I fancied I'd heard so. A very great family, the Gascoynes of Pembrokeshire. I stopped once down at—at your uncle's place," and he glanced inquiringly at Paul, who fronted him angrily. "What a magnificent house, and so well kept, too, with such lovely gardens!"

"Old Sir Emery was *not* my uncle," Paul answered curtly. "I never saw him. But the subject's one I don't care to talk about."

At the top of the hill they changed partners. Armitage, all agog with his news, took Isabel Boyton ahead quickly.

"Well, I've found out who he is," he cried, with triumph in his face; "or, at least, what he calls himself. Now's your chance for that English title, after all, Miss Boyton. He tells me his father's a real live baronet."

"He's quite nice," Isabel answered, gravely digesting the news, "and I don't know that he mightn't fit the place. I hook on to him, Mr. Armitage."

The Englishman smiled at her credulous simplicity. A baronet's son. That threadbare scallywag!

They returned by the inland road in varying moods. Paul, hot with the thought that that horrid secret would now get abroad all over Mentone and make him the laughing-stock of the Promenade du Midi, went home alone to the Hôtel Continental. Armitage burst radiant into the Jardin Public, big with his latest item of gossip.

He found Madame Ceriolo equally excited with her own discovery.

"Just fancy," she said, as he sat down by her side: "*figures-vous, mon ami*, you saw that woman Mr. Gascoyne bow to the moment he left us? Well, who in the world do you suppose she is? A lady's-maid—a lady's-maid at the 'Iles Britanniques!' And he raised his hat to her exactly like an equal."

"And who do you think he is himself," Armitage cried, all eagerness. "You'll never guess. It's too absurd. He says his father's a British baronet."

"Oh, no!" Nea Blair exclaimed, flushing hot with a burst of sympathetic shame. "He never said that! He told me quite the contrary. It can't be possible."

"He did, honour bright; I give you my word for it," Armitage answered, exploding. He's the heir to the finest estate in all South Wales, and he's the last descendant of an ancient and noble family that came over, like the Slys, with Richard Conqueror."

"I don't believe it," Nea exclaimed stoutly; meaning, not that she disbelieved Paul, but disbelieved the report of his ever having said so.

"No, more do I, Miss Blair, if you ask my honest opinion," Armitage answered, laughing. "I expect his uncle's the same sort of baronet as the unfortunate nobleman who lately languished so long in Portland Prison."

"There's a good deal of doubt about baronetcies, I believe," Madame Ceriolo mused to herself aloud. "They're not so regularly looked into as peerages. And I'm given to understand there are a great many baronets knocking about loose on the world at present, who have no more claim to be called Sir Somebody So-and-So than I have to be called—well, the Queen of England."

Very dangerous ground for you, Madame Ceriolo.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR EMERY AND LADY GASCOYNE AT HOME.

SIR EMERY GASCOYNE, Baronet, sat in his own easy-chair in front of his own fireplace at Hillborough, Surrey. It was evening, and Sir Emery rested after his day's labours. He had been out driving from two in the afternoon, and it was cold winter weather for holding the reins, for Sir Emery always drove himself. He had ample reason. His fingers were numbed and cramped with driving. He found it difficult, indeed, to enter in a book a few notes he was endeavouring to make of his afternoon's engagements.

"Ere, Faith, girl," the British baronet called to his daughter in the adjoining room, "I can't 'old the pen. Come along and enter them drives to-day, will you? I'm most clemmed with cold, it's that keen and bitter up o' Kent's 'Ill this weather."

"Just wait a minute, father dear," Faith answered, cheerily, from the kitchen behind. "I'm coming directly. We're hotting up some soup for your supper, here, mother and I. It's lovely soup, darling, and it'll thaw you out just beautifully as soon as you drink it."

The voice was a voice like her brother's own—soft and sweet, with a delicate intonation that made each syllable clear and distinct as the notes of a bell. Sir Emery listened to it with a fatherly smile, for he loved her well.

"God bless that girl!" he said to himself, laying down the pen he could scarcely wield. "It's a comfort to 'ear 'er. She do make a man glad with that pretty small voice of 'ers."

Sir Emery's room was neither large nor handsomely furnished. It was entered direct from the street by a buff-coloured door, and it led by a second similar one into the kitchen behind it. The centre of the apartment was occupied by a square table, with flaps at the side, covered with that peculiar sort of deep brown oil-cloth which is known to the initiated as American leather. A sideboard stood against the further wall, decorated with a couple of large spiky shells and a spotted dog in dark red and white china. The spotted dog Faith had attempted more than once surreptitiously to abolish, but Sir Emery always brought it back again to its place in triumph; it had been his mother's, he said, and he was sort of attached to it. A couple of cane-bottomed chairs, a small horsehair couch, and the seat which Sir Emery himself occupied, completed the furniture of the baronet's reception-room.

And yet there were not wanting, even in that humble home, some signs of feminine taste and æsthetic culture. The spotted dog was an eyesore that Faith could never quite get rid of; but the cheap porcelain vases, with the red and blue bouquets painted crudely on their sides, and the pink paper flowers stuck into their yawning mouths, she had sternly and successfully repressed some months ago.

In their place, two simple little monochromatic jars of Linthorpe pottery were installed on the mantelpiece, and some sprigs of green and late-lingering chrysanthemums usurped the former throne of the pink-paper monstrosities. The curtains were plain, but of a pretty cretonne; the covering of Sir Emery's chair itself was neat and cheerful; and the antimacassar on the couch, worked in simple crewels, had at least the negative merit of unobtrusiveness and harmony. Altogether one could easily see at a glance it was a working man's cottage of the superior sort, kept neat and sweet by loving and tasteful hands, which did all in their power to relieve and diversify its necessary monotony.

For the British baronet was not known as Sir Emery at all to his friends and neighbours, but simply and solely as Gascoyne the Flyman. Most of them had heard, indeed, in a vague and general way, that if everybody had his rights, as poor folk ought to have, Martha Gascoyne would have been My Lady, and the flyman himself would have ridden in a carriage through the handsomest park in the county of Pembroke. But as to calling him anything but plain Gascoyne—him, the driver they had known so well from his childhood, when he played in the street with them all as children—why, it would no more have occurred to those simple souls than it occurs to any of us to address the ordinary familiar descendant of Welsh or Irish princes as "Your Highness" or "Your Majesty."

Sir Emery knocked the ashes out of his black clay pipe, and waited patiently for the advent of his soup. As soon as it arrived he ate it heartily, at the same time dictating to Faith the various items of his day's engagements (for at Hillborough long credit businesses were the order of the day): "Cab from station, Mrs. Morton, one-and-six; put it two shillin'; she'll never pay till Christmas twelve-month! To Kent's 'Ill and back, Cap'en Lloyd, 'arf a suverin'; no, 'arf a suverin's not a penny too much, missus; and then to the Bitches, Mrs. Boyd-Galloway; that lot's worth 'arf a crown, Faith. If ever we see the colour of 'er money, 'arf a crown's not a farden too igh for it."

Faith entered the items dutifully as she was bid, and laid down the ledger with a sigh as soon as they were finished. "I can't bear to think, father," she said, "you have to go out driving cold nights like these, and at your age, too, when you ought to be sitting home here comfortably by the fire."

"I can't abear to think it myself neither," Mrs. Gascoyne echoed—for why keep up, now we're in the bosom of the family, the useless farce of describing her as My Lady? It was only in the respected works of Debrett and Burke that she figured under that unfamiliar and noble designation. To all the neighbours in Plowden's Court, she was nothing more than plain Mrs. Gascoyne, who, if everybody had

their rights, would no doubt have been a real live lady.

The baronet stirred the fire with meditative poker.

"It's a wonderful pity," he murmured, philosophically, "that nothing couldn't never be done in the way of makin' money out of that there baronite-cy. It's a wonderful pity that after all them years we should be livin' on 'ere, missus, the same as usual, a-drivin' a cab day an' night for a livelihood, when we're ashally an' in point of law an' fac' baronites of the United Kingdom. It beats me 'ow it is we can't make money out of it."

"I always think," Mrs. Gascoyne responded, taking out her knitting, "that you don't understand 'ow to do it, Emery."

"Mother dear!" Faith said low, in a warning voice, for she knew only too well whither this prelude inevitably tended.

The baronet of the United Kingdom slowly filled his pipe once more, as he finished the soup and poured himself out a glassful of beer from the jug at his elbow. "It can't be done," he answered, confidently. "There ain't no doubt about it that it can't be done. It stands to reason it can't. If it could be done, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a' done it, you warrant you, long ago."

"This ain't 'ow you'd ought to be livin' at your age, though, Emery," Mrs. Gascoyne went on, sticking to her point. "If we only knowed 'ow, we'd ought to be making money out of it some 'ow."

"Mr. Solomons is a rare clever man," the baronet replied, puffing vigorously away at the freshly-lighted pipe. "Wot I say is this, missus, if it could 'a' been done, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a' done it."

Faith made a bid for a gentle diversion.

"I met Mr. Solomons this evening," she said, "as I was coming home from school, and he told me to tell you he'd look in on business to-morrow morning, before you went down to meet the 10.40."

"You're tired, Faith," her father said, eyeing her kindly.

Faith smoothed back the hair from her high white forehead—so like her brother's.

"Only a little bit, father," she answered, with rather a wearied smile. "It's the infants that are so tiring. They wear one out. They don't mean to be worries, poor little souls, of course; but they do distract one a bit sometimes."

"I wish you was well quit of them infants," Mrs. Gascoyne remarked, "and could 'and them over to the pupil-teachers. The big girls don't give no trouble at all, in the manner of speaking, by the side of the little ones. It's when you've took the infants, I always take notice, you comes 'ome most worn and tired-like."

"Oh, it's nothing," Faith answered, taking her mother's hand in hers and smoothing it gently. "It'll be over soon for this term—the

holidays begin on Wednesday. And when I think of father, driving out in the cold on Kent's Hill this weather, I'm ashamed of myself to think I ever complain a word about the infants."

"They're rarely trying, them infants, I'll be bound," her father continued, philosophically slow. "I mind what it was myself, when you was all little ones, you an' Paul an' the rest, afore we buried 'Ope and Charity, playin' around the 'osses feet, an' kickin' up that row that a man couldn't 'ardly 'ear to take a order. Charity was a rare one to make a noise, she was; she was the biggest o' the three, when you was all born; 'for the greatest o' these,' says the parson, 'is Charity.' And wot it must be to 'ave twenty or thirty o' 'em, all to once, a-cryin' and a-chatterin', why it beats everything."

"'Ope and Charity was two blessed little creaturos," Mrs. Gascoyne interposed with a tear in her eye. "They never got in nobody's way, I'm sure, Emery. 'Ope 'ud be eighteen year old come May, if she'd 'a' lived. An' Charity was always 'ead of the class in 'rithmetic. Miss Taylor, sho says to me more 'n once, 'Wot a wonderful 'ead that there child o' yours have got, to be sure, Mrs. Gascoyne, for figgers and such like!'"

"It's a rare clever man, Mr. Solomons," the father repeated, relapsing, after the wont of his kind, into the dominant subject; "an' if any man could do it, you take my word for it, missus, Mr. Solomons 'ud 'a' done it."

"It seems sort o' throwed away as things stand now," Mrs. Gascoyne went on, in spite of a quick deprecatory glance from her daughter's eyes. "It ain't no good at all, as far as I can see, except for a customer to chaff you about sometimes."

The baronet blew the smoke slowly through his ringed lips.

"I might 'a' kep' a public, an' made money out of it that way," he said, "but you was always agin a public, mother; an' I don't blame you for it. A public's a poor sort o' way for a man to employ a historical name, as Mr. Solomons put it. But if I 'adn't 'a' been married now, afore the title came to us, I might 'a' made something of it like that myself, you see, missus—meaning to say, in the way of a hairess."

Poor Faith saw that the bolt had fallen—that well-known bolt which descended with periodical regularity from the clear sky of her father's unruffled good humour—and she gave up the attempt any longer to delay the rising tempest.

"I'm sure, Emery," her mother broke in, with a stifled sob, "you needn't always be a-castin' that in my teeth—that I stood in your way agin' makin' your fortune. It ain't no fault o' mine, nor my people's, neither, that you was took with me and art me to marry you. Arnt Emily was always agin my 'avin' you. An' there was many as said at

the time, you know yourself well enough, I'd thrown myself away, and I might 'a done better far to take another one. Why, there was Alfred Dyke, him as owned the mill at Chase's Corner—"

The baronet of the United Kingdom checked her threatened outburst of early reminiscences kindly.

"It ain't for myself I'm thinkin', mother," he said, with a nod or two of his chin—"it ain't for myself, not anyways, but for the children. Wot a thing it 'ud 'a been for Faith and Paul, now, if I'd 'a 'appened to be a bachelor, don't you see, at the time w'en this thing fell in, and 'ad married a haïress, as would 'ave brought 'em up like ladies and gentlemen—ladies an' gentlemen the same as they'd ought to be!"

Faith couldn't forbear a gentle smile.

"But, father dear," she said, smoothing his hand with hers, "don't you see yourself it wouldn't have been Paul and me at all in that case? It'd be somebody else we none of us know or care anything about, wouldn't it?"

"But it do seem a pity," her father went on musingly, "that the value of the baronite-cy, for commercial purposes," he paused awhile, and then repeated once more that high-sounding phrase, "for commercial purposes," rolling it on his palate like one who loved it, "should 'a been clean throwed away, as Mr. Solomons says, all through the fact that I 'appened to be married afore I come into it."

Mrs. Gascoyne's handkerchief went up to her eyes with dramatic rapidity; and Faith, holding up one finger in warning to her father, stroked her mother's hair with her other hand with filial tenderness.

"I wish," she said, half angrily, "Mr. Solomons had never put these ideas into your head, father. I'm sure you'd never have thought of it all for yourself. You'd never have dreamt of making money out of anything on earth so sacred as that is."

"I don't say, Faith," her father went on, eyeing his beer with the light of the paraffin lamp shining through it, "I don't say as ever I'd 'a married for money, or made capital like, as Mr. Solomon says, out o' the title, an' that. I don't say as I've the manners or the eddication to do it. I'm satisfied with your mother, as 'as always bin a true and faithful wife to me, in sickness an' in 'ealth, an' no woman better."

"If you weren't," Faith interposed, "you'd be the ungratefulest man in all Hillborough."

"If I wasn't," her father repeated dutifully, following his cue, "I'd be the ongratefulest man in all 'illborough. I know all that, an' I ain't a-denyin' of it. But wot I says is just this: I says to Solomon this very last Sunday, 'Mr. Solomons,' says I, 'if I'd 'a bin a bachelor wen this tittle fell in, there's many a tidy woman as 'ad her thousand pound or two put away in the bank 'ud 'a bin glad to call 'erself Lady Gascoyne on the strength of it.'"

"Emery," his wife sobbed, holding her face in her hands, "I call it most onmanly of you. Many's the time I've done a good cry, all along of your talking in that onmanly manner."

The father of the family turned round to her soothingly. "Mind you, mother," he went on, in a demonstrative voice, "I don't say as I'd ever 'avo wanted 'er for all 'er thousands. I ain't that kind; I'm not one as sets so much store by the money. Wot I do say is, as a matter o' business, it's a pity the baronite-cy should be throwed away, an' all for nothing."

"It won't be throwed away," the mother responded, drying her eyes hysterically, "not after our time. Paul 'ave 'ad a good education, an' Paul 'll marry a woman as is fit for 'im."

"There ain't no doubt at all about that," the British baronet answered in a mollified tone. "As Mr. Solomons says, our Paul 'ave a splendid future before him."

"Oxford 'ave made a gentleman of 'im," Mrs. Gascoyne continued, gloating over the words.

"It 'ave," the father replied, gazing deep into the fire. "There ain't no doubt of it. We've all got reason to be main grateful to Mr. Solomons for that much."

"I never feel quite so sure about that, somehow," Faith ventured to say. "I often wonder whether Paul wouldn't have been happier, and whether we wouldn't all have been happier, if Mr. Solomons had never meddled at all in our private business."

"I do wonder at you, Faith!" her mother exclaimed aghast. "You, to talk like that, when we ought all to be so beholden like to Mr. Solomons!"

"Look what 'e've done for Paul!" the father cried eagerly. "If it wasn't for 'im, Paul might be tendin' the 'osses still, the same as I do."

"But we've got to pay him for it," Faith answered stoutly. "Sooner or later we've got to pay him. And see what notes of hand he's made you sign for it!"

"Ay, but Paul 'll settle all that," the father replied with absolute confidence, "and afore long, too, I warrant you, little one! Why, if it hadn't been for Mr. Solomons, we'd never so much as 'a thought o' sendin' 'im to collego an' makin' a gentleman of 'im. An' now, Mr. Solomons says, 'e's a'most through with 'is collegin', an' ready to make 'is start in life. If 'e does as Mr. Solomons means 'im to do, 'e'll pay it all off, principal an' interest, as easy as winkin'. We've all got reason to be main grateful to Mr. Solomons. 'E's a clever one, 'e is, if ever there was one. An' 'e says it as knows; says 'e to me, 'Gascoyne,' says 'e, 'your boy Paul, if 'e plays 'is cards well,' says 'e, 'as 'e'd ought to play 'em, 'ave a splendid future,' says 'e, 'before 'im.'"

"But he won't play them as Mr. Solomons

wants him, I'm sure," Faith answered, un-abashed. "He'll play them his own way. He can't do any other."

"E'll pay it all off," the baronet repeated, ruminating the words with infinite pleasure; "e'll pay it all off, when 'e once gets 'is start, principal an' interest, as easy as winkin'."

The happiness he derived from the mere sound of those opulent expressions, "principal and interest," as he rolled them on his palate, seemed more than to repay him for any little passing discomfort the sense of indebtedness to his supposed benefactor might otherwise have cost him. It makes a man feel almost like a capitalist himself when he can talk glibly about principal and interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL'S ADVISER.

IN another room at Hillborough, that self-same evening, two other people were discussing still more eagerly together this identical problem of the market-value of a British baronetcy.

The house in which they discussed it had a dingy, stingy, glooming-looking front, commanding a full view of the market and the High Street; and on the venerable wire-blinds in the office-window the inquiring wayfarer might make out through the dust that clogged them the simple legend, "Judah P. Solomons, Auctioneer and Estate Agent." Not that Mr. Solomons really subsisted upon the nett profits of his auctioneering and his commission on rents. Those were but the ostensible and officially avowed sources of his comfortable revenue. The business that really enriched Mr. Solomons—for Mr. Solomons was undoubtedly rich—was the less respectable and less openly confessed trade of a general money-lender. Mr. Solomons was, in fact, by profession a capitalist. He made those familiar advances, on note of hand alone, without security, at moderate interest, which have so often roused our ardent admiration for the generous mixture of philanthropic spirit and the love of adventure in the amiable lender when we read the tempting announcement of the proffered boon in the advertisement columns of our pet daily paper.

Mr. Solomons himself, the philanthropist in question, was a short but portly man of a certain age; it was clear he had thriven on the results of well-directed benevolence. His figure was rotund and his face fat; he had small, black, beady eyes, rich in life and humour; and his mouth, though full, was by no means deficient in human kindness. His hair was curly, and displayed, perhaps, a trifling disregard of economy in the matter of bear's grease; but his entire appearance was not wholly unprepossessing; he looked like a sharp and cunning business man, in whom, nevertheless, the trade of assisting his fellow-

creatures in distress (for a modest percentage) had not altogether killed out the heart that beat within the ample and well-filled fancy waist-coat. The acute reader may, perhaps, already have jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Solomons was by race a Jew, and in that conclusion the acute reader would not, as a matter of fact, have been quite unjustified. In creed, however, Mr. Solomons had conformed so successfully to the Church of England (mainly, perhaps, for business reasons) that he filled at that moment the onerous post of vicar's churchwarden for the parish of Hillborough. In a country town Judaism is at a discount; and Mr. Solomons was too good a Jew at heart ever to touch anything at a discount, except of course, for the purpose of "bulling" or "bearing" it.

The younger gentleman, who sat opposite Mr. Solomons at the first-floor fireplace above the dingy office, was half an inch taller, and many inches smaller round the waist; but he otherwise bore a distinct resemblance in figure and feature to his prosperous relative. Only, in Lionel Solomon's face, the cunning and the sharpness of his uncle's eyes and mouth seemed, if anything, to be actually exaggerated, while the redeeming qualities of good-humour and good-fellowship were both, on the contrary, conspicuous by their absence. Lionel was handsome with the Oriental handsomeness of the well-fed young Jew; and he had brought down from town with him the offensive, underbred, jaunty cosmopolitanism of the shady middle class in that great desert of London which is so peculiarly repulsive to a cultivated understanding. His hair was even curlier and more oleaginous than Mr. Solomons' own; and he held between his lips a cheap, bad cigar, which he managed with all the consummate easy grace of a gentleman accustomed to ride into the City every morning in the envied seat beside the driver of the omnibus he honoured with his distinguished patronage.

Mr. Solomons unrolled a packet of greasy, much folded papers, which he had taken from a pigeon-hole in the safe by his side, and laid them one after another upon his knee, where he regarded them close with evident affection. "Yes, Leo," he said reassuringly, "they're all right. Every penny of that money's as safe as houses."

"I'd like to see the collateral, that's all," Mr. Lionel answered, with a jaunty toss of his curled head. "It's a precious lot of money to lend upon personal security, and that a man of straw, or less than straw, if it comes to that, Uncle Judah."

Mr. Solomons took up the newest of the lot and examined it tenderly.

"Twelve months after date," he mused to himself, in a softly murmuring tone, "for value received—two hundred pounds—renewable with twenty per cent. interest. Emery Gascoyne—perfectly regular. It's a good in-

vestment, Leo—a good investment." He turned over a second, and looked at the endorsement. "Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart.," he continued, softly, "accepted as fair as an acceptance can be. Good business, Leo, my boy—very good business."

"How much did you give him for this two hundred, now?" Mr. Lionel asked, in a somewhat contemptuous tone, taking it up carefully.

The elder man seized it once more with a nervous grasp, like one who fears to let a favourite and fragile object pass for a moment out of his own possession.

"A hundred and fifty," he answered, refolding it and replacing it in due order; "and then twenty per cent., you see, on the full two hundred, every time it's renewed, after the first year, gives a good interest."

Lionel looked up with an amused air.

"Well, all I can say," he put in with a smile, "is—that ain't the way we do business in the City."

"Perhaps not," his uncle answered, with a faint air of vexation. It was evident that this was his pet venture, and that certain vague doubts as to its perfect soundness in his own mind made him all the more impatient of outside criticism. "But, Leo, you don't know everything in London. One of the great points in a country business is just that—to be able to tell who you can trust, and who you can't, on their own sense of honesty."

Mr. Lionel sneered.

"I trust nobody myself," he responded, vigorously, puffing at his cigar with a violent puff, to enforce the full depth and breadth of his sentiment.

"Then that's bad business," Mr. Solomons answered, with one fat forefinger raised didactically. "Take my word for it, my boy, that's bad business. I wouldn't be half what I am now, and you'd be helping me in the old shop in the Borough, if I'd trusted nobody. But I knew who to trust, and that's what's made me. Bind 'em down on paper as fast as you can, of course: I'm not one to omit having everything legal, and fixed, and regular; but all the papers and stamps and parchments in the world won't do you any good if you've got hold of a rogue. No, never a stamp of them. A rogue can't be made to pay if he don't want. A rogue 'll go through the court to spite you. A rogue 'll take things before his honour the county court judge, and explain everything; and his honour 'll give judgment for reduced interest. It ain't the paper and the stamps and the signatures that does it; it's the man himself you've got to trust to. You once get hold of an honest man, and if he works his fingers to the bone, and his knees to the stumps, he'll pay you somehow—principal and interest; he'll pay you somehow. And Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart., he's an honest man, and so's Paul. He may be only a cab and fly proprietor," Mr. Solomons went on, giving his debtor the full benefit of his whole legal

designation; "but Sir Emery Gascoyne, Bart., cab and fly proprietor, of Plowden's Court, Hillborough, is as honest a man as ever stepped, and Paul, his son, is one that takes after him."

"It was that title of 'Bart.,' in my opinion, that led you astray in the first instance," his nephew went on, with a touch of scorn in his voice; "and having once begun, you didn't like to confess your mistake, and you've kept to it ever since, getting deeper and deeper in it."

Mr. Solomons shuffled uneasily in his chair. The young man had touched him on a tender point.

"I don't deny, Leo," he answered with apologetic softness, "that the title of 'Bart.' had a great deal to do with it. A man who's born a Jew can't get over that; and I'm proud to think, if I've changed my religion, I've never attempted to shake off my ancestors. It came about like this, you see. It was six years ago or more—let me see, I have it here—yes, seven years ago on the fourth of February—number one falls due on the fourth every year; it was seven years ago Gascoyne came to me, and he says, 'Mr. Solomons, I want your advice, knowing you to be a better man of business than any lawyer in the town'—for Gascoyne knows Barr and Wilkie are fools—and I've just come into a baronetcy,' says he. Well, when I heard that, I lifted my hat, having always a strong respect for rank and title and everything of that sort—I wouldn't be one of the seed of Abraham if I hadn't—and I said to him, 'Sir Emery, I'm very glad to hear it; and if there's anything I can do for you in the way of a little temporary accommodation'—thinking, of course, there was money coming with it, as a man would naturally expect with a baronetcy—I'll be happy to arrange it on the most moderate terms for you.' For when a man in his position comes into a title and a big estate, he's likely to want a little temporary accommodation at first, just to make a good show when he goes to claim his own of the executors."

"To be sure," his nephew assented blandly.

"Well, you see," Mr. Solomons went on, still in a very self-exultatory tone, "it soon turned out that there wasn't any money—that the money'd all gone to the other branch of the family. But having made Sir Emery a preliminary advance, and having been the very first man in the world to call him 'Sir Emery'—Mr. Solomons loved to repeat that title in private life whenever he could; it was so dear to his soul to be thus brought into contact with a real live baronet—"I thought to myself, 'Well, having once begun, I'll see the thing through to the bitter end now, whatever it costs me.' And I look at it accordingly, Leo, as a long investment."

"A very long investment indeed!" Mr. Lionel answered, with an ugly smile. "You'll

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"I'll see every farthing of it back in full, I'll take my davy!" his uncle retorted, with a rather red face—his heart was suspected. "Gascoyne and his son are honest people—good honest people as ever lived—and they'll pay me all, if they work themselves to death for it. But it wasn't only the money I thought of," he continued, after a short pause. "No, no, Leo. It wasn't only the money I thought of."

"It's all I think of," his nephew said candidly.

"Then so much the worse for you, my dear," Mr. Solomons replied, with equal frankness. "That's a mistake in life. You miss the half of it. What I thought was this. Here's this man—a common flyman—a petty little cab-owner with four horses of his own—no more than four horses, and screws at that; but a British baronet. If you and I were to work all our lives, Leo, and slave and save, and toil and moid, we'd never rise to be British baronets. But this man's born one, d'you see, or born as good as one; born what you and I'd give ten thousand pounds to be made this minute. Says I to myself, turning the matter over, What a pity to think there's nothing to be made, for him or for me, out of Gascoyne's baronetcy! If Gascoyne was younger, says I, and better brought up, he might have made money out of it by marrying an heiress. But he's married already, and the old lady's not likely to die; or, if she did, he's not marketable now; he's too old and too simple. Still, there's the boy—there's the boy Paul. He's young and pliable yet; clay fresh to hand; you can make what you like of him. Well, I don't deny there was a touch of sentiment in it all; for I love a title; but I couldn't bear either to think of a good chance being thrown away—a chance of making money out of it, for him and for me; for a title has always a value of its own, and it goes against the grain with me to see a thing that has a value of its own thrown away, as it were, and let go to waste, for want of a little temporary employment."

"To be sure," his nephew assented, with an acquiescent nod, for there he, too, could sympathise most fully.

"So the idea occurred to me," Mr. Solomons went on, "couldn't I lend those two people enough, on their own notes of hand—three, six, nine, twelve, renewable annually—to give the young man Paul a thorough good schooling, and send him to Oxford and make a gentleman of him?"

"But the security," the younger man exclaimed, impatiently—"the security? the security? Where's your collateral?"

Mr. Solomons shook his head with a very deliberate and sapient shake. "There's securities and securities, Leo," he said, "and you don't understand but one particular kind

of 'em. I'd as soon have Emery Gascoyne's paper as any landed gentleman's in all England. Anyhow, I made up my mind to do it, and I did it, Leo; that's the long and short of it. I made 'em both insure their lives—the Hand-in-Hand, a capital company—and I've paid the premiums ever since myself; here's the receipts, you see, for the last six years, as proper as proper."

"You've paid the premiums yourself?" Lionel echoed, with a cunning smile.

"But I've made 'em sign for 'em, of course," his uncle continued, hastily, "I've made 'em sign for 'em. They've covered it all, and the bonuses go to increase the sum insured, which balances premiums almost. Here's the papers; here they are," and he fumbled the bundle with eager fingers.

The nephew regarded them with pitying contempt. "What's the good of all these?" he cried, turning them over sceptically. "The fellow was a minor when he signed the lot. I daresay he's a minor still, if it comes to that, They've no legal value."

"My dear," the uncle went on with a very grave face, "you think a great deal too much about what's legal, and a great deal too little about moral obligation, that keeps alive the money-lending. Yes, he *was* a minor, and he's a minor still; but when he comes of age, you mark my words, he'll sign again for every penny of the money. He's a good boy, Paul, an honest boy, and sooner than let me lose a penny of my advances he'd work as my slave to his dying day—and him that'll live to be a baronet of the United Kingdom. Besides," Mr. Solomons continued more cheerfully, "he knows I've done a great deal for him. He knows it's me that has made his fortune. I've sent him to school, and sent him to college, and made a gentleman of him. He knows he's got to behave fair and honest by me, as I've behaved by him. He knows he's got to look out for money. As soon as he's married, and married well, he'll pay me back every penny, principal and interest."

"Suppose he don't marry well?" the nephew interposed with a provoking smile; "suppose the heiress don't choose to take him?"

Mr. Solomons folded the notes of hand and other documents into a neat little bundle, and tied them up once more with a dirty red tape, preparatory to locking them up in the safe in their accustomed pigeon-hole.

"There's more heiresses than one in the world," he said with a determined air. "If heiress number one won't rise to the fly, heiress number two will swallow it, I warrant you. No, no, Leo; don't you talk to me. A baronet's worth his price in the market any day. Young women don't get a 'My Lady' for nothing, and Paul's been taught exactly what he's worth. He knows it's a duty he owes to me, and he owes to his father; that jointly and severally they're bound

Paul

to pay; and that to marry an heiress is the cheapest and easiest way to pay me."

"Her money'll be all strictly tied up," the nephew exclaimed. "I know their way, these landed people, with their contracts and their settlements."

"A man of title can always dictate his own terms," the money-lender answered with more worldly wisdom; "at least, among the manufacturers. He can sell himself for as much as he chooses somewhere and hang out for his price till they choose to pay it."

Mr. Lionel gave a grunt of extreme dissatisfaction. "Well, it's no business of mine, of course," he observed in a distinct bad humour; "but what I say is this: you'd got no right ever to begin upon it; it ain't legitimate trading; it's too precious speculative."

His uncle glanced back at him with a reproachful look. "There'll be enough for you without it, Leo," he answered; "anyway when I'm gone. It's all for you, you know very well, that I slave and hoard. And I only wish you were such a young man as Paul is. I take a sort of pride in him, I don't deny. I only wish I'd put you to college the same as him and made a gentleman of you."

"There ain't much to be made out of going to college," Mr. Lionel replied, picking his teeth with his penknife; "at least, if you ain't going into business afterwards as a British baronet."

"It's all for you, Leo," Mr. Solomons repeated, rising to put back the papers in their places. "And even if this turns out a bad speculation—which I don't believe—there'll be more than enough for you, anyhow, without it."

CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTATION.

AT Mentone the sun continued to shine and the world to bask in the joys of his rays, in spite of the snow on Kent's Hill and the white fogs that enwrapped the county of Surrey. To Paul's great surprise, too, when once the dreaded secret was out, the burden of bearing it became infinitely lessened. He had shrunk, with all the shyness of a sensitive nature, from letting the loungers on the Promenade du Midi know the real truth about his false position. He thought they would find in it nothing but cause for veiled ridicule. But, as a matter of fact, on that very evening the indefatigable Armitage, pursuing his quest through every villa he knew in town, discovered at last in a friend's library a copy of Debrett's invaluable work on the people whom one can really know, don't you know, in England. Turning over the pages with a triumphant hand, to put to rout and confusion this absurd scallywag with his cock-and-bull story about his fine relations, Armitage was fairly dumbfounded to come upon the entry,

"GASCOYNE, SIR EMERY, 14th baronet," followed by half a page of the usual profoundly interesting genealogical detail, and ending with the fine abrupt but concise information, "*Residence*, Plowden's Court, Hillborough, Surrey."

The Plowden's Court of real life was a narrow entry off the main street of the sleepy little country town, but the Plowden's Court which these words naturally conjured up before Armitage's fancy, seen in such a connection, was a stately and dignified Elizabethan mansion, standing in its own grounds of heaven knows how many statute acres, and surrounded by garden, lawn, and park-lands.

Armitage rubbed his eyes in blank amazement. Was it possible, then, that the scallywag had spoken the truth? In spite of all appearances to the contrary, was he really the heir to a baronetcy of Charles II.'s creation, and to the noblest estate in the county of Pembroke?

He glanced through the profoundly interesting genealogical details with a curious eye. Yes, that was all plain sailing enough. "Succeeded his second cousin, Sir Emery Charles Emeric Gascoyne, 18th baronet, *vide infra*." Armitage proceeded to *vide infra* accordingly, and noticed at once that the name of Paul seemed to alternate regularly throughout the list with the name of Emery as the distinctive mark of the Gascoyne baronetcy. So far, clearly, the scallywag's story seemed to hold together much better than he expected. And next as to the estates? Not a word said about them, to be sure; but, then, the respected and esteemed Debrett deals only in exalted rank, and has nothing to say on such inferior subjects as filthy lucre. "*Residence*, Plowden's Court, Hillborough." Fancy the scallywag coming, after all, from a baronial mansion in the county of Surrey!

Next day the entire little world of Mentone had duly digested the singular news that the unobtrusive Oxford undergraduate, who had come out to the Riviera strictly *incog.*, as a tutor to the blonde young man at the Continental, was really the heir to a baronetcy in disguise, and the scion of a distinguished Pembrokeshire family. And all the world remarked at once, with its usual acuteness, that, in spite of his shyness, they had said from the first Paul Gascoyne was a delightful young man and had most charming manners.

All the world, indeed, has always divined these things beforehand, and is immensely surprised at all the rest of the world's stupidity in not having perceived them.

Three days later, however, at the usual little conclave in the Jardin Public—the "School for Scandal" Madame Ceriolo christened the particular corner affected by Armitage and his group of intimates—that ardent inquirer came down quite triumphant with a letter in his hand.

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the usual little —the "School christened the Armitage and his inquirer came a letter in his seated himself

with a comprehensive nod on his favourite bench, "it turns out the scallywag's nobody much. I've just had a line from my friend Rimington at Hipsley, near Hillborough, and he says, though the lad's supposed to be heir to a baronetcy, his father's a fellow in a very small way of business (reasons of delicacy, he writes, prevent him from particularising further), and not at all in Society, or anything like it, in Surrey. It seems the grandfather of the present baronet was a very bad lot, a scapegrace of low habits, who consorted chiefly with grooms or stable-boys, and married a milkmaid or something of the sort; no doubt after circumstances which, as Herodotus says, it is not lawful to mention, after which he was very properly cut off by his papa, the baronet of the time, with the traditional shilling. With that modest capital as his whole start in life, the scallywag's ancestor set up in town; and there his descendants, living on the change for the shilling, I suppose, went from bad to worse, till the present man has sunk practically to the level of the working classes. When old Sir Emery, whom I knew in Pembrokehire, popped off the hooks, some six or seven years ago, he entirely ignored this debased stock—they'd intermarried, meanwhile, with cooks or scullery-maids—and left the estates at Gascoyne Manor and elsewhere to a younger branch, who had always kept up their position as gentlemen. So the scallywag's papa's only a bare courtesy baronet after all; by birth and education the scallywag himself is—well, just what you'd expect him to be. Rimington says in a postscript, "Armitage went on, glancing around him with an air of virtuous self-abnegation, "he hopes I won't mention these facts to anyone for young Gascoyne's sake; so I'm sure I can count upon all of *you* not to breathe a word of it, or to let it make the very slightest difference in any way in your treatment of the scallywag."

Madame Ceriolo, raising a pair of dove-like eyes, saw her chance to score a point. "But he really is the heir to a baronetcy in spite of everything, you see," she put in languidly. "That's very satisfactory. When people who are born of noble blood happen to be poor, or to be placed in any dependent position, other people often cast most unjustifiable doubts upon the truth of what they say about their own families. I sympathise with Mr. Gascoyne"; and she glanced down with a meaning look at the countess's coronet engraved on the plain silver locket she wore at her bosom.

"He'll be a Sir, though, any way, won't he?" Isabel Boyton asked, going straight to the point with true American business perception.

"He'll be a Sir, any way, Miss Boyton," Armitage retorted sharply. "And he'll make his wife, when he catches one, into a real My Lady."

"For my part," Nea Blair put in with quiet firmness. "I don't care a pin whether he's

heir to a baronetcy or whether he's not. I take him for himself. I think he's a very nice, good, sensible young man, and, whoever his parents are, he's a born gentleman."

"One of nature's gentlemen!" Madame Ceriolo interjected lackadaisically, with a darted glance from her tortoiseshell eyeglasses at Armitage, who, playing with his button, and feeling the sense of the meeting was entirely with the scallywag, retired gracefully upon a safe commonplace: "After all, it doesn't so much matter what a man's father is, as what he is himself—except, of course, for purposes of probate."

So, in the end, as it turned out, the world of Mentone agreed to accept Paul Gascoyne with a very good grace as a future baronet, and to invite him freely to the afternoon teas and mild "at homes" which form the staple of its innocent invalidish entertainments. A baronet is a baronet, if it comes to that, be he more or less, as the lawyers would gracefully put it; and a baronet's son who has been to Oxford, no matter how poor, has always a possible future open before him. Nay, more, the mere fact of the little mystery as to his origin, and the whispered story about the lady's-maid and the dubious grandmamma, added just a touch of romance to the whole affair, which made up in piquancy for whatever Paul lacked in exterior adornment. If there's anything odd about a man's antecedents (and still more about a woman's), it's a mere toss-up whether Society chooses to pet him or damn him. But when once Society has made up its mind to accept him, it becomes forthwith a point of honour to stick up for him at all risks, and to see in him nothing but the most consummate virtues. The very oddity is held to constitute a distinction. In point of fact, accordingly, Paul Gascoyne became the fashion of Mentone. And having once attained that proud position, as the small tame lion of a provincial show, everybody, of course, discovered in him at once unsuspected mines of learning or talent, and agreed unanimously over five o'clock teatables that young Gascoyne was really a most charming and interesting person.

The consequence was that for the next six weeks Paul saw a good deal of Society at Mentone—more, in fact, than he had ever seen of that commodity anywhere in his life before, and amongst it of Nea Blair and Isabel Boyton.

Nea he liked and admired immensely. And with good reason. For it was the very first time he had ever had the opportunity of meeting an educated English lady and conversing with her on equal terms about subjects that both could alike discourse of. He was always flattered when Nea talked to him; the subtle delight of finding one's self able to hold one's own fairly with a beautiful and clever woman moved him strangely. Hitherto he had only seen and admired such beings from afar. To stand face to face with Nea Blair, and find

that she did not disdain to talk with him—nay, that she evidently preferred his society to Thistleton's or Armitage's—was to the shy young man from Plowden's Court a positive revelation of delight and gladness. It is to be feared that he even neglected Aristotle's Ethics, and his duty to Mr. Solomons, more than once, in his readiness to go where Nea Blair might possibly meet him. He paid for it afterwards in qualms of conscience, to be sure; but as long as it lasted it was perfect bliss to him.

Not that he believed or knew he was falling in love with Nea. If that explanation of his mental phenomena had ever occurred to his honest soul, Paul would have felt that those mysterious Claims which weighed on him so heavily made it quite necessary for him to see as little as possible of the fair enchantress. He knew he was bound by solemn bond and pact to Mr. Solomons to sell himself finally in the matrimonial market for hard cash to the highest bidder; and though even then uncomfortable doubts as to the justice or morality of such a proceeding sometimes forced themselves obtrusively upon Paul's mind, while the day of sale seemed still so far off, he would nevertheless have shrunk from letting himself get entangled in any other bond which might prove adverse in the end to Mr. Solomons' fair chance of repayment. After all, he thought casuistically to himself, there was always a possibility that he might finally happen to fall in love with some nice girl who was also the heiress Mr. Solomons dreamed about; and then, and in that case—but there he broke down. The nearer he drew to the actual fact and pact of marriage, the more repugnant did the whole wild scheme appear to him.

One sunny afternoon, a week or two later, the whole little coterie of the "Rivea d'Or" had made an excursion together on to the rocky hills that bound either side of the old mule-path to Castellar. When they reached the ridge where great rounded bosses of ice-worn sandstone form a huge hog's back overlooking the twin-valleys to right and left, they dispersed by twos and threes, as men and maidens will do, among the rosemary bushes and the scanty umbrella-pines, or sat down in groups upon the bare, smooth rocks, in full view of the sea and the jagged summit of the gigantic Berceau.

Paul found himself, quite unconsciously, wandering among the low lentisk scrub with Nea Blair, and, seating themselves at last on the edge of the slope, with the lemons gleaming yellow in the Caral Valley far below their feet, they discoursed together, as youth and maiden discourse, of heaven and earth, and fate and philosophy, but more particularly of their own two selves, with that profound interest which youth and a free heart always lend to that entrancing subject when discussed *à deux*, under the spreading shade of a romantic pine tree.

"And when you've taken your degree, what then?" Nea asked, with some eagerness, after

Paul had duly enlightened her mind as to the precise period of his Greats examination, and the chances for and against his obtaining a First in that arduous undertaking.

"Well, then," Paul answered, with some little embarrassment, "after that, I suppose, I must go in for a Fellowship."

"But if you get a Fellowship you won't be able to marry, will you?" Nea inquired, with interest. "Haven't they got some horribly barbarous rule at Oxford, that if a Fellow marries he must lose his position?"

"No, no; not now," Paul answered, smiling. "*C'estail autrefois ainsi, mais nous avons changé tout cela*," as Sganarelle says in the play. A Fellowship, now, is for a fixed period."

"Well, that's well, anyhow," Nea went on, more easily. "I hope, Mr. Gascoyne, you'll get your Fellowship."

"Thank you," Paul replied. "That's very kind of you. But I'm ashamed of having bored you with all this talk about myself—the subject upon which, as somebody once put it, 'all men are fluent and none agreeable.'"

"The somebody was wrong, then," Nea answered with decision. "Whenever one meets an interesting individuality one wants to know as much as possible about it. Don't you think," and she looked up at him with her charming smile, "in our society, nowadays, we never really get to know half enough about one another?"

"I know nothing about Society," Paul replied, frankly. "I've never been in it. I've had no chance. But I think—in as much of the world as I know, which is a very tiny world indeed—we do somehow seem to go round and round, like people in the maze at Hampton Court, and never get at the heart and core one of the other."

Dangerous ground, dangerous ground, dear Paul, for Mr. Solomons' chance of recovering in full on that long investment.

Nea felt it so, perhaps, for she paused a moment, and examined a little pink rock-cistus that sprang from a cleft in the sandstone at her feet with unnecessarily close attention for anyone who was not a professed botanist. Then she said, suddenly, as if with a burst of inspiration:

"I shall be up in Oxford myself, I expect, next summer term. Mrs. Douglas, the wife of the Accadian professor—at Magdalen, you know—means to ask me up for the Eights or something."

"That'll be just delightful!" Paul answered, warmly. "We shall have some chance then of really getting to know one another."

"I always liked Oxford," Nea murmured, looking down, and half afraid the conversation was leading her too far.

"I just love every inch of it," Paul replied, with fervour. "But, then, I've much reason to be grateful to Oxford. I owe it everything."

"You'll live there when you're a Fellow?" Nea asked, looking up again.

Paul hesitated a second, and pulled grasses in his turn.

"I have to get my Fellowship first," he said, with some reserve. "And then—and then I suppose I must do something or other to make some money. I have heavy claims upon me."

"Oh dear, what a pity!" Nea cried, with genuine regret.

"Why so, Miss Blair?"

"Because it's so dreadful you should have to enter the world with claims, whatever they may be, to clog you. If you were free to choose your own walk in life, you know, you might do such wonders."

"I should like literature," Paul went on, relapsing once more into that egoistic vein.

"But, of course that's impossible."

"Why impossible?" Nea asked, quickly.

"Because nobody can make money at literature nowadays," Paul answered, with a sigh; "and my circumstances are such that it's absolutely necessary, before everything else, I should make money, and make it quickly. I must sacrifice everything to my chance of making money."

"I see," Nea answered, with a faint tinge of displeasure in her tone. And she thought to herself, "Perhaps he means he must get rich so as to keep up the dignity of the title. If so, I'm really and truly sorry; for I thought he had a great deal better stuff than that in him."

"There are so many claims I have to satisfy," Paul went on, in a low voice, as if answering her inmost unspoken thought. "My time's not my own. It's somebody else's. I've mortgaged it all by anticipation."

Nea gave a start.

"Then you're engaged," she said, putting the obvious feminine interpretation upon his ambiguous sentence. (A woman reads everything by the light of her own world—courtship and marriage.)

"Oh, no," Paul answered, smiling. "I didn't mean that, or anything like it. I wouldn't mind that. It was something much more serious. I start in life with a grave burden."

CHAPTER X.

THE HEIRESS IS WILLING.

"SAY, Mr. Gascoyne," Isabel Boyton exclaimed, catching him up, breathless, on the Promenade du Midi, one day in the last week of Paul's stay at Mentone; "will you come and ride with us over to La Mortola tomorrow?"

"I'm sorry," Paul answered, smiling at her free Pennsylvanian mode of address, "but I've no horse to ride upon."

"Oh, I don't mean ride horseback," Isabel explained promptly; "momma and I have

chartered a kahrriage—a brake, I think you call it over here in Europe—and we're taking a party of ladies and gentlemen across to see the gardens."

"I shall be delighted to go," Paul answered truthfully—for Nea would be there, he knew, and he went accordingly.

At La Mortola, however, he soon found out that Miss Isabel meant to keep him all for herself, and, indeed, she stuck to him with creditable persistence. This was a very new sensation for Paul, who had never before been made so much of; but he accepted it as youth accepts almost everything—with the frank delight of a new experience.

And how charming it was, that drive across to La Mortola, with the hot southern afternoon sun beating full upon the hills, Bordighera gleaming white upon its seaward point, and Cap Martin behind bathed in broad floods of glorious sunshine! How Grimaldi shone among its silvery olives! How the spires of Mentone rose tall and slender in the glistening background! At the deep dark gorge, spanned by the Pont St. Louis, they crossed the frontier, and Paul found himself for the first time in his life on the soil of Italy. Past the Italian Custom House and the old Saracen tower in Dr. Bennett's garden, they wound along the ledge to the corner by La Mortola; and then they skirted a deep rocky ravine, all in darkest shade, with green pines clambering up its steep sides, till they halted against a broken cliff near the summit. At last they reached those marvellous hanging gardens, hewn out of the bare rock, where feathery African palms and broad-leaved tropical vegetation bask in the hot sun as on their native deserts. There they descended and wandered about at will, for it was a "free day," and Isabel Boyton, taking possession of Paul, walked him off alone, with American coolness, to a seat that overhung the villa and the sea, with a view along the coast for a hundred miles from San Remo to Toulon.

"You go back next week," she said at once, after an awkward pause, when Paul had found nothing more to say to her, for he talked far less freely with the heiress than with Nea Blair.

"Yes; I go back next week," Paul repeated vaguely.

"To Oxford?"

"To Oxford."

"We shall miss you so at Mentone," the Pennsylvanian went on with genuine regret. "You see, we're so shorthanded for gentlemen, ain't we?"

"You're very kind," Paul murmured, much abashed by this frank remark. "But perhaps somebody else will come who'll do as well—or better."

"What's a good time to come and see Oxford in?" Isabel asked abruptly, without heeding his remark, and gazing with a vacant expression seaward.

"Summer term's the best for visitors," Paul answered, taken aback. "I should say about the twentieth of May, for example."

"Perhaps I'll fetch mamma along and have a look at it then," the golden-haired American continued, playing nervously with her parasol. "We could have a good time at Oxford about May, couldn't we?"

"I'll do my best to help you enjoy yourself," Paul replied, as in duty bound, but with a sinking recollection that just about that precise date he would be straining every nerve for his final examination.

"I call that real nice of you," Isabel answered, still poking her parasol into the ground by her side. "Will you take us about and show us the college, the same as we read about in 'Tom Brown at Oxford'?"

"The University's changed a good deal since those days," Paul replied with a smile, "but I shall be glad to do whatever I can to make your visit a pleasant one. Though Thisleton," he added, after a short pause, "would be able to show you a great deal more about the place than I can."

The Pennsylvanian brought back her clear blue eyes from space with a sudden flash upon him.

"Why?" she asked curtly.

"Because he's so much richer," Paul answered, boldly shaming the devil. "He's a member of all the clubs and sports and everything. His father's one of the wealthiest men in Sheffield."

Isabel drew a face with her parasol on the gravel below.

"I don't care a pin for that," she answered shortly.

"I suppose not. You're so rich yourself," Paul retorted, with a sigh. Then he turned the subject clumsily. "These are lovely gardens."

"My poppa could buy up a place like this with a month's income," the young lady answered, refusing to follow the false trail. She said it, not with any vulgar, boastful air, but simply as if to put him in possession of the facts of the case. She wanted him to know her exact position.

"Why isn't he here with you?" Paul ventured to ask, just to keep the conversational ball rolling.

"Oh my!" Isabel exclaimed. "What a question to ask! Why, he's got to stop home and mind the store, of course, like every other man, hasn't he?"

"He's in business, then!" Paul said, with a start of surprise.

"In my country," Isabel answered gravely, "it ain't respectable *not* to be in business. My poppa's the richest man in Philadelphia." Then she looked down at her shoes, and added once more, "But I don't care a pin about money myself, for all that. What I care for is whether people are nice or not. And I like Mr. Thisleton well enough in a sort of way;

he's quite nice, of course and there's nothing grabby about him. But he kind of don't take me."

"No?" Paul said, feeling he was called upon to say something.

"No," Isabel answered; "he don't," and then relapsed into strange silence.

For a moment or two they sat with their eyes fixed on the ground, and neither spoke a single word to the other. Then Isabel began once more, just to encourage him a bit, for she misinterpreted his awkwardness and shyness:

"It is a lovely place. I'm most inclined to make my poppa give up the States and come across to reside for a permanence in some elegant place like this 'n Europe."

"Your father would come if you wished him, then?" Paul asked, all trembling with excitement, for he dimly suspected he was neglecting his duty (and Mr. Solomons' interests) in the most culpable manner.

Isabel noticed his tremulous voice, and answered in the softest tones she could command:

"He'd do anything 'most to make me happy."

"Indeed," Paul replied, and gazed once more with a preoccupied air towards the distant Esterels. They came out so clear against the blue horizon.

"Yes, poppa just spoils me," Isabel went on abstractedly; "he's a real good poppa. And how lovely it'd be to pass one's life in a place like this, with all those glorious mountains and hills around one, and that elegant sea tumbling and shining right in front of one's eye—with somebody that loved one."

The running was getting uncomfortably hot now.

"It would be delightful indeed," Paul echoed, very warm in the face, "if only one had got the money to do it with."

Isabel waited a moment again with down-cast eyes; but her neighbour seemed disinclined to continue the conversation. And to think he had the power to make any woman My Lady! She paused and looked long at him. Then she rose at last with a stifled sigh. He was real nice, she thought, this British baronet's son, and he trembled a good bit, and felt like proposing, but he couldn't just make up his mind right away on the spot to say what he wanted. English young men are so absurdly awkward.

"Well, we shall meet at Oxford, any way," she said lightly, moving down towards the shore. "Let's get along and see what those great red plants on the rocks are, Mr. Gascoyne. I expect by this time mamma'll be looking out for me."

Paul went home to the Continental that night with a terrible consciousness of neglected duty. Modest as he was, he couldn't even pretend to conceal from himself the obvious

fact that the golden-haired Pennsylvanian had exhibited a marked preference for his conversation and society. He fancied she almost expected him to propose to her. And, indeed, the idea was not wholly of his own suggestion, Thistleton, when relating the common gossip of the Promenade du Midi, had more than once announced his firm belief that Paul might have "the Yankee girl for the asking." And Paul himself, much inclined to underrate his own powers of attraction, could not, nevertheless, deny in his own soul the patent evidences that Isabel Boyton, for all her wealth, was fully susceptible to the charms of a British baronetcy.

He stood at last face to face in earnest with a great Difficulty.

Could he or could he not carry out his Compact?

As he sat by himself in his room at the "Continental" that night, he thought it all over, how it had gradually grown up step by step from the very beginning. It seemed so natural, every bit of it, to him, who had grown up with it himself, as a sort of religion. So strange to anyone else who heard it only for the first time now as a completed transaction.

For six years past and more, his father and mother and Mr. Solomons—the three great authorities that framed his life for him—had impressed it upon him as the first article of his practical creed that he was to grow up a gentleman and marry an heiress.

To us, what an ignoble aim it seems! but on Paul it had always been enforced for years by all the sanctions of parental wisdom and commercial honesty as the supreme necessity. He was indebted to Mr. Solomons for his schooling, and his clothing, and his Oxford education; and the way he was bound to repay Mr. Solomons was to follow instructions to the very letter and marry an heiress. His stock-in-trade in life was his prospective title, and he was to sell that commodity, in accordance with recognised commercial maxims, in the dearest market.

And yet, strange to say, Paul Gascoyne himself was not mercenary. He had passively accepted the rôle in life, as most young men passively accept the choice of a profession made for them by their parents, without thinking very much, one way or the other, as to either its morality or its feasibility. He was so young when Mr. Solomons first hit upon his grand scheme for utilising the reversion to a British baronetcy—no more than fourteen—that he had got the idea thoroughly dinned into his head long before he was able to recognise in all its naked hideousness the base and sordid side of that hateful compact. Solomons had supplied him with money from time to time—not liberally, to be sure, for he did not wish to make his *protégé's* extravagant, but in sufficient quantities for the simple needs and wants of a scallywag; and Paul had accepted the money, giving in return his worthless notes

of hand, as youth always accepts its livelihood from its accustomed purveyors, without much care or thought as to the right or wrong of the customary supplies.

And then there had been so much besides to distract his attention from the abstract question of the ethics of marriage. He was occupied so much with reading for the schools, and taking pupils in his spare time to help eke out his scanty income; for he felt deeply what a drain he had always made on the family resources, and how much his father was beginning to stand in need of a son's assistance in the management of his business. The question of the moment—the definite question then and there before him at each instant of his life—the necessity for reading hard and taking a good degree, and the parallel necessity for living at Oxford as cheaply as even a scallywag could do it—had overshadowed and eclipsed that remoter question of the underlying morality of the whole transaction, which had been settled for him beforehand, as it were, by his father and Mr. Solomons.

Paul, in fact, was the inheritor of two arduous heritages—the barren baronetcy, and Mr. Solomons' Claims to principal and interest.

Till that evening, then, though qualms of conscience had now and then obtruded themselves, he had never fairly and squarely faced his supreme difficulty. But to-night, in the solitude of his room at the "Continental," sitting by himself in the dark (so as not to waste his friend Thistleton's *dougies* at a franc apiece, hotel reckoning; for economy in small matters had long since become instinctive with him) he turned the matter over for the first time in his soul, with the definite issue clearly before him—could he or could he not ever conscientiously marry Isabel Boyton?

His whole soul within him revolted at once with a tempestuous No. Now that the chance for carrying Mr. Solomons' scheme into actual practice had finally arrived—nay, even had thrust itself bodily upon him—he felt at once the whole meanness and baseness of the entire arrangement. Not so far as Mr. Solomons and his father were concerned—of their wisdom and goodness he could hardly have permitted himself even now to entertain a doubt—but so far as his own execution of their plan was at issue, he realised that at once in its true colours.

It would be wickedly and grossly unjust to Isabel. And it would be doing violence at the same time to his own inner and better nature.

But then the claims upon him? Those terrible notes of hand. He took out his pocket-book, lighted one candle, and totted them all up, sum by sum, at compound interest, as they stood there confessed, from the very first moment. School expenses, tailor's bill, travelling, rooms and sundries; all renewable yearly at twenty per cent., and all running on

indefinitely for ever at a rapidly-growing rate. Premiums on policies, washing, books—good heavens! how the totals appalled and staggered him. If he worked his life long at any educated profession he would never be able to earn enough to clear off that deadly load of debt with which he started. He saw clearly before him two awful alternatives: either to hunt and capture his heiress, as originally designed—in spite of all his seething internal repugnance; or else to play false to his father and Mr. Solomons—to whom he owed everything—by keeping his benefactor (as he had been taught to regard him) waiting for years perhaps for his full repayment.

Waiting for years, indeed! Why, at twenty per cent., renewable annually, the sum could never get paid at all. It would go on accumulating as long as he lived, bond behind bond, and remain, when he died, as a heritage of debt to whoever came after him.

Not that anybody would ever come after him at all, if it came to that; for, as things then stood, he would never, never be able to marry. The honesty might revert to the remote cousin in Pembrokehire.

And then, for one brief moment, Nea Blair's sweet face as she sat on the hillside that day at Sant' Agnese flashed across Paul's mental vision as he blew out the candle once more in utter despair, and gave him one further internal quail of conscience. Was it possible he was influenced in what he had just been thinking by any wicked *arrière-pensée* as to Nea—that beautiful, impossible, unattainable Nea? He, who was nobody, to dream about her. In his inmost soul, he trusted not; for he felt how unworthy a thing it would be to betray his father, and Faith, and Mr. Solomons, and his duty, all for the sake of his own wicked personal likes and fancies. Whatever came, he would at least try to keep Nea out of his mind severely, and decide the question upon its own merits.

He would try to envisage it thus only to himself. Dare he do this great wrong to Isabel Boyton?

Or to any other woman circumstanced like Isabel?

He would try to let it hinge on that, not on Nea.

For, after all, what was Nea to him or he to Nea? Six weeks before he had never seen her; and now—he realised with a pang to himself that he wouldn't like to think he should never again see Nea.

And all through the long sleepless night that followed, one truth kept breaking in upon him more clearly than ever: if he would, he might marry Isabel Boyton—and pay off Mr. Solomons without Isabel's ever missing those few paltry hundreds. To Isabel's poppa they were but a drop in the bucket: and yet to him, Paul Gascayne, they were a millstone round his neck, an insupportable burden put upon him almost against his will before he had yet arrived at years of discretion.

CHAPTER XI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

THREE days later Paul and his companion turned their backs on Mentone *en route* for England. Scallywag as he was, Paul had so far succeeded in interesting the little world of the "Rives d'Or" that Madame Ceriolo, and Nea Blair, and Isabel Boyton, and her mamma, and even the great Armitage himself—the leader of the coterie—came down to the station to see him off. Armitage thought it was always well to fall in with the general opinion of Society upon anybody or anything. But just before they bade their last adieus at the barrier, a tidy little Frenchwoman in a plain black dress pushed her way to the front with a bouquet in her hand of prodigious dimensions. The Ceriolo recognised her in a moment again. It was that compromising little lady's-maid at the "Iles Britanniques."

"*Comment c'est vous, Mademoiselle Clarice!*" Paul cried, taking her hand with perfect *empressement*, though he blushed a little before the faces of all his fine acquaintances. "How kind of you to come and see me off! I called last night at your hotel, but they told me you were engaged and couldn't see me."

"*Justement; je faisais la coiffure de Madame,*" Mademoiselle Clarice answered, unabashed by the presence of the Ceriolo and so much good society. "But *cher Monsieur Paul*, I couldn't let you go and leave Mentone *sans vous serrer la main—moi qui vous ai connu quand vous étiez tout petit, tout petit—mais tout petit comme ça, monsieur.*" And I do myself the pleasure of bringing you a bouquet for *cette chère maman*. You will make her my compliments, *cette chère maman*. Tell her it has been so delightful to see you again. It has recalled those so happy days at Hillborough."

Paul took the big bouquet without any display of *mauvaise honte*, and thanked the voluble little Mademoiselle Clarice for it in French as fluent almost as her own. Mademoiselle Clarice had tears in her eyes. "And to hear you talk that beautiful language," she cried, "*cette belle langue que je vous ai enseignée moi-même—ah, que c'est charmant!*" She stooped forward irresistibly, and kissed him on both cheeks. Mademoiselle Clarice was forty, but plump and well preserved. Paul accepted the kisses with a very good grace, as well as the two hands with which she bid him farewell. "And now I must run back," she said; "I must run back this minute. *Madame m'attend—elle s'empatiente tant, Madame!*" And with another good kiss and two shakes of the hand she was gone, and Paul was left standing alone by the barrier.

"What a strange creature!" Madame Ceriolo cried, putting up those long-handled tortoiseshell eyeglasses of hers, and following the impressionable Frenchwoman with her

stony glances as she left the station. "Who is she, Mr. Gascoyne, and how on earth did you ever come to know her?"

"She's an old friend of my mother's," Paul answered once more, blurring out the whole simple truth, "and she taught me French at Hillborough when I was a little chap, for she was a lady's-maid at a house where my father was coachman." And then without waiting to observe the effect of this painful Parthian shot, delivered trembling, he raised his hat, and bidding a comprehensive good-bye to all at once, took refuge with Thistleton behind the passengers' barrier.

"Goodness gracious!" Madame Ceriolo cried, looking round with an astonished air of surprise to Armitage, "did you ever in your life see anything so funny? One would have thought the woman would have had good feeling and good sense enough not to inflict herself upon him in the present company. She may have been a friend of his mother's, of course, and all that sort of thing; but if she wanted to see him she should have gone to his hotel and seen him quietly. She ought to remember that now he's heir to a baronetcy and a member of a university, and admitted as such into good society." For since Mentone had decided upon adopting Paul, and therefore backed him up for every possible virtue, it had been Madame's cue to insist most strenuously upon the genealogical fact that wherever a person of noble race may happen to be born, or whatever position he may happen to fill, he retains his sixteen quarters of nobility intact for all that. This was one for Paul, and two for Madame Ceriolo.

"Why, I thought it was so nice of her," Nea objected, with her simple English tender-heartedness, "to come down and see him off so simply before us all, and to bring him those flowers, and, in the simplicity of her heart, to fall on his neck and kiss him openly. Her eyes were quite full of tears, too. I'm sure, Madame Ceriolo, she's very fond of him."

"Nea, my dear," Madame Ceriolo remarked severely, with the precise smile of the British matron, "your views are really quite revolutionary. There should be natural lines between the various classes. People mustn't all get mixed up promiscuously. Even if she liked him, she shouldn't let her feelings get the better of her. She should always remember to keep her proper place, no matter what her private sentiments may prompt her to."

And, indeed, in Madame Ceriolo's family they managed these things a great deal better.

For, as Nea and Madame Ceriolo were coming to Mentone that very autumn, a little episode had occurred in a coffee-room at Marseilles which may be here related, as flashing a ray of incidental light on the character of Madame Ceriolo's aristocratic antecedents.

They reached Marseilles late in the evening, and drove at once to the Hotel du Louvre—it

was part of Madame's cue that she knew the best and most luxurious hotel at every town in Europe—where they went down in their travelling dress to the restaurant for supper. As they entered they found they had the room to themselves, and an obsequious waiter, in an irreproachable white tie and with a spotless napkin hanging gracefully on his arm, motioned them over without a word to a table near the fireplace. For the indivisible moment of time while they took their seats an observant spectator might just have noted a flash of recognition in Madame's eyes, and an answering flash that twinkled silently in the obsequious waiter's. But neither spoke a word of any sort to the other, save in the way of business. Madame took the *carte* that the waiter handed her, with a stifled yawn, and ordered an omelette and a bottle of Beaujolais with the same careless air with which she would have ordered it from any other young man in a similar position.

At the end of the supper, however, she sent Nea up to get her necessaries for the night unpacked, and waited down herself to ask a few questions, to make quite sure, she said, about the trains to-morrow.

As soon as Nea had left the room, the obsequious waiter approached a little nearer, and, still with his unequivocally respectful air and his spotless napkin hanging gracefully over his arm, stood evidently awaiting Madame Ceriolo's orders.

Madame eyed him a moment with a perfect calm through those aristocratic glasses, and then observed quietly, "*Tiens, c'est toi,*" without moving at all from the position she occupied when Nea left her.

"Yes, it's me, Polly," the irreproachable waiter answered, in his native English, straight and stiff as ever.

"I thought you were going to make the season at Pau this winter," Madame Ceriolo remarked in an arid tone of voice, a little sour about the upper notes, and crumbling her bread with one hand uneasily.

"I was," the irreproachable waiter replied, without moving a muscle, "but I ain't now. The governor and me had a blow-up about terms. So I gave him the slip, and engaged on here—extra hand for the Riviera season."

"You made the summer at Scheveningen, I think?" Madame Ceriolo remarked languidly, as one discusses the affairs of an indifferent acquaintance.

The irreproachable waiter bowed his stiff, official bow.

"At the 'Hôtel des Anglais,'" he answered, in his unvarying hotel tone.

"Good business?"

"No; beastly. All Dutch and Gerinans. Them gentlemen button up their pockets too tight. If it hadn't been for a family or two of English and Americans dropping in casual, the tips wouldn't so much as have paid for my washing. Dickeyes and cuffs come dear at

Scheveningen." There was a slight pause. Then Madame Ceriolo spoke again.

"Tom."

"Yes, Polly."

"Where's Karl?"

"With a variety troupe at Berlin, when I last heard from him."

"Doing well?"

"Pretty well, I believe. Feathering his nest. But banjos ain't anything like what they'd used to be. The line's overstocked, that's the long and the short of it."

"How's mother?" Madame Ceriolo asked, carelessly.

"Drunk," the irreproachable waiter responded, rearranging his tie. "Drunk, as usual."

"Still at the Dials?"

The waiter nodded. "She can't go far from dear old Drury," he answered vaguely.

"Well, I love the Lane, myself," Madame Ceriolo responded. "It's a rare old place. I never was happier, Tom, in all my life, than in the days when I was on, long ago, in the pantomime."

"You're on the quiet now, I see," the waiter remarked, with a respectful inclination—in case anybody should happen to see him through the glass doors that opened on to the corridor.

Madame Ceriolo bent her head. "On the strict quiet," she responded coldly.

"Governess?"

"Well, pretty much that sort of thing, you know. Companion. Chaperon."

"To an English young lady, I gathered?"

"Yes. Clergyman's daughter."

The waiter's face almost relaxed into a broad smile. "Well, you always were a clever one, Polly!" he exclaimed, delighted.

Madame Ceriolo drew herself up very stiff, as one who prefers to discourage levity in the lower classes. "I hope I know how to behave myself in whatever society I may happen to be placed," she answered, chillily.

"You do," the waiter replied. "You're a rare one at that. I wish I could make as much out of the French and German as you and Karl do. Mine's all thrown away—all waiters speak the lot. Say, though: what are you now—I mean in the way of name and nation?"

"*Toujours Ceriolo*," Madame answered, with a quiet smile. "After all, it's safer. If anybody who knew you before comes up and calls you by a different name when you've taken an *alias*, how awfully awkward! And really, if it comes to that, Ceriolo's as good a name for a person to own as any I could invent. It's suggestive of anything on earth but organ-grinding."

For, in truth, Madame's father, the reputed Count, had really earned a precarious livelihood by the production of sweet music on that despised instrument.

The irreproachable waiter smiled an im-

maculate smile. "And are you Italian, or what?" he asked, always respectful.

"Tyroless," Madame answered carelessly; "it's better so. Widow of a Count in the Austrian service. Mother an Englishwoman—which is true for once, you see—brought up in Vienna in the English Church by special agreement—to suit the clergyman."

"And how much are you going to stand me for my discreet silence?" the waiter asked, coming half a step nearer, and assuming a less agreeable tone and countenance.

Madame pulled out ten francs from her dainty purse, and laid the coin gingerly on the edge of the table.

"Won't do," the waiter observed, shaking his head solemnly. "Not enough by a long way. Won't do at all. When an affectionate brother meets his sister again, whom he hasn't seen for more'n a twelvemonth—and keeps her secrets—he can't be put off with half a Napoleon. No, no, Polly; you must stand me a sovereign."

"It's an imposition," Madame Ceriolo, remarked, growing very red in the face, but remembering even so to preserve her blindest tone, and drawing the sum in question unwillingly from her pocket. "Tom, I call it a perfect imposition."

"All right, my angel," the waiter replied calmly, slipping the coin at once into his pocket. "I've done as much more 'en once for you, Polly, when you were hard up; and, after all, it ain't often we meet now, is it, my chicken?"

"You're rude and coarse," Madame Ceriolo answered, rising to go. "I wonder you dare to address me in such vulgar language."

"Well, considering you're a countess, it is rather cheeky," the waiter replied, smiling, but still with the imperturbable attitude of the well-bred servant. "You see, Polly, we ain't all like you. I wish we were! We ain't all learnt to speak the Queen's English with ease and correctness from the elocution master at Drury."

At that moment, before he could reveal any further items of domestic history a head appeared at the door, and the waiter, without altering a shade of his tone, continued respectfully, in fluent French:

"*Très bien, madame*. The omnibus will be here to take down your luggage to the 11.40."

All which will suggest to the intelligent reader's mind the fact that in Madame Ceriolo's family the distinctions of rank were duly observed, and that no member of that noble and well-bred house ever allowed his feelings of affection or of contempt, of anger or of laughter, to get the better at any time of his sober judgment.

But this had happened three months before the moment when Paul Gascoyne and Charlie Thistleton were seen out of the station, away down at Mentone, by Mademoiselle Clarice, the lady's-maid.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

WHILE Paul and his pupil were travelling north to Paris by the *train de luxe* (at the pupil's expense, of course—*bien entendu*), away over in England Faith Gascoyne was journeying homeward with a heavy heart and a parliamentary ticket by the slow train from Dorsetshire and Hillborough.

For Faith had managed to get away for her holiday to her mother's friends in a sheltered coastwise nook in the beloved West Country, where the sun had shone for her (by rare good luck) almost as brightly as on the Riviera, and where the breakers had whitened almost as blue a sea as that which shattered itself in shimmering spray upon the bold and broken rocks of La Mortola. A delightful holiday indeed for poor hardworked Faith, far from the alternate drudgery of school or home, and safe from the perpetual din and uproar of those joyous but all too effusively happy infants. And now that short, peaceful interlude of rest and change was fairly over, and to-day Faith must return to her post at Hillborough in good time for the reopening of school, the day after to-morrow.

At the second station after she left Seaminster, Faith, who had hitherto enjoyed all to herself the commodious little wooden horse-box known as a third-class compartment on the Great Occidental Railway, was somewhat surprised to see the door of her carriage thrown open with a flourish by a footman in livery, and a middle-aged lady (for to Faith thirty-seven was already middle-age), far better dressed than the average of Parliamentary passengers, seat herself with a quiet smile of polite recognition at the opposite window.

Faith's democratic back was set up at once by the lady's presumption in venturing to intrude her well-bred presence into a Parliamentary compartment. People who employ footmen in livery ought to herd with their equals in a well-padded first, instead of rudely thrusting themselves to spy out the manners and customs of their fellow Christians whose purses compel them to travel third in commodious horseboxes. Faith resented the intrusion as she resented the calls of the district visitors who dropped in at all times and seasons to bestow good advice gratis upon herself and her mother, but would have been very much astonished if the cab-owner's wife had reciprocated the attention by sending in a card casually on their own "at home" day. These *de haut en bas* civilities were not much to Faith's taste: she had too much self-respect and self-reverence herself to care either for obtruding on others or being herself obtruded upon.

But the lady settled herself down in her seat, and spoke with such unassuming and sprightly graciousness to Faith that even that National

Schoolmistress's proud heart was melted by degrees, and before the two had reached Wilmington Junction they were hard at work in conversation with one another.

"Dear me, whers's my lunch-basket?" the lady said at last, looking round for the racks which did not exist in the commodious horse-box; "is it over your side, my dear?"

She said "my dear" so simply and naturally that Faith could hardly find it in her heart to answer:

"I think your footman—or, at least, the gentleman in tight silk stockings who saw you off—put it under the seat there."

The lady laughed a good-natured laugh.

"Oh, he's not *my* footman," she answered, stooping down to look for it; "he belongs to some friends where I have been spending Christmas. It doesn't run to footmen with *me*, I can assure you. If it did, I wouldn't be travelling third this morning."

"No?" Faith queried coldly.

"No," the lady answered, with a gentle but very decisive smile, "nor you either, if it comes to that. Nobody ever travels third by preference, so don't pretend it. There are people who tell you they do, but then they're snobs, and also untruthful. They're afraid to say they do it for economy; I'm not. I travel third because it's cheap. As Pooch-Bah says in the play, I do it but I don't like it. Now, say the truth yourself: wouldn't you, if you could, always travel first or second?"

"I never tried," Faith answered evasively; "I've never had money enough."

"Now, that's right!" the stranger exclaimed warmly opening her lunch-basket and taking out some cold grouse and a flask of claret. "That shows at once you have blue blood. I'm a great admirer of blue blood myself; I firmly believe in it."

"I don't precisely see what blue blood's got to do with the matter," Faith answered, bewildered. "I come from a little country town in Surrey, and I'm a National Schoolmistress."

"Exactly," the lady echoed. "The very moment I set eyes on you I felt sure you had blue blood. I saw it in your wrists, and I wasn't mistaken. You mayn't know it, perhaps; a great many people have got blue blood and aren't aware of it. But it's there, for all that, as blue as indigo; and I, who am a connoisseur in matters of blood, can always spot it;" and she proceeded to take out from a dainty case a knife, fork, spoon, and a couple of drinking-glasses.

"But how did you spot it in me just now?" Faith asked with a smile, not wholly unflattered.

"Because you weren't ashamed to say you'd never travelled anything but third, and because you insisted then with unnecessary zeal on the smallness and humility of your own surroundings. Only blue blood ever does that. Everybody's descended from a duke on one side and a cobbler on the other. Snobs try

always to bring forward their duke and conceal their cobbler. Blue blood's prouder and franker, too. It insists upon its cobbler being duly recognised."

"Well, I'm not ashamed of mine; I'm proud of him," Faith answered, colouring up; "but all the same, I don't like blue blood, it's so hard and unfeeling. It makes me mad sometimes. You wouldn't believe how it keeps people waiting for their money."

"I'm sorry you don't like it," the lady said, with the same soft smile as before and a bewitching look, "for then you won't like me. I'm blue, very blue, as blue as the sky, and I don't pretend to deny it. Will you take a little grouse and a glass of claret?"

"Thank you," Faith answered coldly, flushing up once more; "I have my own lunch here in my own parcel."

"What have you got?" the lady asked, with the inquiring air of a profound gourmet.

"Hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches," Faith said, half choking.

"Well, Lady Seaminster didn't give me any hard-boiled eggs," the lady said, searching in vain in her basket. "May I have one of yours? Let's share our provisions."

Faith could hardly say no, though she saw at once through the polite ruse; so she passed an egg to the lady with an "Oh, of course, I shall be delighted," and proceeded herself to eat a very dry sandwich.

"Have some grouse," the lady said, passing her over a piece on a little electro-plated dish, "and a glass of claret."

"I've never tasted claret," Faith answered, grimly; "I don't know if I'll like it."

"All the better reason for trying it now," the lady replied, still cheerfully kind, in spite of rebuffs. "And so you thought that elegant gentleman in the silk stockings was my servant, did you? What a capital joke! But people at Oxford can't afford to keep footmen in livery, you know. We're as poor as church mice there—poor, but cultured."

A flash of interest gleamed for a second in Faith's eye at the mention of Oxford.

"Oh, you live there, do you?" she said. "I should love to see Oxford."

"Yes, my husband's professor of Accadian," the lady remarked; "his name's Douglas. But I dare say you don't know what Accadian is. I didn't, I'm sure, till I married Archie."

A fuller flush came on Faith's cheek. "I've heard of it from my brother," she said, simply. "I think it was the language spoken in Assyria before the Assyrians went there, wasn't it? Ah, yes, Paul told me so! And I've heard him speak of your husband, too, I fancy."

"Have you a brother at Oxford, then?" the lady asked, with a start.

"Yes, at Christ Church."

"Why, that's Archie's college," the lady went on, smiling. "What's his name? I may know him."

"I don't think so. His name's Gascoyne." Mrs. Douglas fairly jumped with her triumph. "There! didn't I tell you so?" she cried, clapping her hands in her joy. "You have blue blood. It's as clear as mud. Archie's told me all about your brother. He's poor but blue. I knew you were blue. Your father's a baronet."

Faith trembled all over at this sudden recognition. "Yes," she answered with some annoyance; "but he's as poor as he can be. He's a cab-driver, too. I told you I wasn't ashamed of my cobbler."

"And I told you I was sure you had blue blood," Mrs. Douglas echoed, delighted. "Now, this is quite too lovely, trying to pass yourself off for a *roturier* like that; but it's no use with me. I see through these flimsy disguises always. Have some more claret? it's not so bad, is it? And so you'd love to go to Oxford?"

"Yes," Faith faltered; "Paul's told me so much about it."

"Guard," the lady cried, as they stopped at a station, "do we change here? Mind you tell us when we get to Hillborough Junction."

She had enjoined this upon him already more than a dozen times since they started on their journey, and the guard was beginning to get a little tired of it.

"All right, mum," he said, in a testy voice; "don't you be afeard. I'll see you all right. Jest you sit where you are until I come and tell you."

"Why, that's where I have to change," Faith observed, as Mrs. Douglas withdrew her head from the window.

"Well, that's all right," Mrs. Douglas replied, with a cheery nod. "Now we can have such a nice *tête-à-tête* together. You must tell me all about your brother and yourself. Do you know, my husband thinks your brother's awfully clever?"

She had found the right way to Faith's heart at last. Thus adjured, Faith began to gossip with real goodwill about Paul, and her mother, and the business at Hillborough, and the life of a schoolmistress, and the trials she endured at the hands (and throats) of those unconscious infants. She talked away more and more familiarly as the time went on till dusk set in, and the lamp in the horsebox alone was left to light them. Mrs. Douglas, in spite of her prejudice in favour of blue blood, was really sympathetic; and by dexterous side-questions she drew out of Faith the inmost longings and troubles of her heart: how the local Hillborough grandees owed long bills which they wouldn't pay; how Paul was cramped at Christ Church; or want of money; how her father was growing rheumatic and too old for his work; how hard a time they often had in the winter; how fond she was of Paul, and Paul of her; how he had taught her ... his holidays all he learnt himself; how they two read Dante and

Victor Hugo together, and how she longed with all her heart and soul to be free from the indescribable bondage of the infants. Everything she told—Mrs. Douglas was so excellent and friendly a wielder of the pump—save that one hateful secret about Mr. Solomons. There Faith was always discreetly silent. She hated that horrible compact so thoroughly in her soul that she could never so much as bring herself to speak of it, even in the family circle.

They talked so long and talked so earnestly that they quite forgot about Hillborough Junction.

At last, as the clock was sounding seven, they arrived at a big and noisy station, where porters were shouting, and trains were puffing, and the electric light was fizzing and spluttering. Mrs. Douglas put her head out of the window once more, and called out to the guard, "Now, is this Hillborough Junction?"

The guard, with a righteously-astonished air, cried back in reply, "Hillborough Junction? Why, what are you thinking of, mum? We passed Hillborough Junction a clear two hours ago."

Faith looked at Mrs. Douglas, and Mrs. Douglas looked at Faith. They stared in silence. Then the elder woman burst suddenly into a good-natured laugh. It was no use bullying that righteously-astonished guard. He was clearly expostulation-proof by long experience. "When can we get a train back?" she asked instead, with practical wisdom.

And the guard answered in the same business-like tone, "You can't get no train back to-night at all; last's gone. You'll have to stop here till to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Douglas laughed again; to her it was a mere adventure. The Lightbody's carriage which was sent down to meet her would have to go back to the Rectory empty—that was all. But tears rushed up suddenly into poor Faith's eyes. To her it was nothing less than a grave misfortune.

"Oh, where can I go?" she cried, clasping her hands together nervously. "And mother'll be so dreadfully, dreadfully frightened!"

Mrs. Douglas's face grew somewhat graver. "You must come with me to an hotel," she answered kindly.

Faith looked back at her with eyes of genuine dismay.

"I can't," she murmured in a choking voice. "I—I couldn't afford to go to any hotel where you'd go to."

Mrs. Douglas took in the whole difficulty at a glance. "How much have you got with you, dear?" she asked gently.

"Four and sixpence," Faith answered with a terrible gulp. To her that was indeed a formidable sum to have to spend unexpectedly upon a night's lodging.

"If I were to lend you a few shillings——" Mrs. Douglas began, but Faith shook her head.

"That would be no use, thank you—thank you ever so much," she replied, gasping; "I couldn't pay it back—I mean, I couldn't afford to pay so much for—for a mistake of my own in not getting out at the right station."

"The mistake was mine," Mrs. Douglas said with prompt decision. "It was I who misled you. I ought to have asked." She hesitated for a moment. "There's a good hotel here, I know," she began once more timidly, "if you'd only be so nice as to come there as my guest."

But Faith shook her head still more vigorously than before.

"You're a dear, kind thing," she cried, grasping her new friend's hand and pressing it warmly, "and I'm ever so grateful. But I couldn't—I couldn't—oh no, I couldn't! It may be pride, and it may be the blood of the cobblers in me, I don't know which; but I never could do it—I really couldn't."

Mrs. Douglas had tact enough to see at once she really meant it, and that nothing on earth would shake her firm resolve; so she paused a moment to collect her thoughts. Then she said once more, with that perfect good-humour which seemed never to desert her, "Well, if that's so, my dear, there's no other way out of it. The mountain won't come to Mahomet, it appears, so I suppose Mahomet must go to the mountain. If you won't come to my hotel, my child, I'll just have to go and stop at yours to take care of you."

Faith drew back with a little cry of deprecation. "Oh no," she exclaimed; "I could never let you do that, I'm sure, Mrs. Douglas."

But on that point Mrs. Douglas was firm. The rock of the *convenances* on which she founded her plea could not have been more immovable in its fixity than herself.

"There are no two ways about it, my dear," she said, after Faith had pleaded in vain every plea she knew to be let go alone to her own sort of lodging-house; "the thing's impossible. I'm a married woman, and older than you, and I know all about it. A girl of your age—and a baronet's daughter, too—can't be permitted to go by herself to an inn or public-house, especially the sort of inn you seem to imply, without a married woman to guarantee her and chaperon her. As a Christian creature, I couldn't dream of allowing it. Why, that dear mother of yours would go out of her senses if she only knew you'd been passing the night alone in such a place without me to take care of you." A sudden thought seemed to strike her all at once. "Stop here a second," she said; "I'll soon come back to you."

Faith stopped on the platform by her one small portmanteau for five minutes or more; and then Mrs. Douglas returned triumphant. "This is what I have said," she exclaimed, brandishing a piece of white paper all radiant before her. "I've sent off a telegram: 'Mrs. Douglas, Pendlebury, to Gascoyne, Plowden's

Court, Hillborough, Surrey. Your daughter has missed her train, but is here and safe. Will return to-morrow. I am taking her to a respectable inn for the night. I am a friend of the Lightbodies, of Cheriton Rectory."

"How did you know my address?" Faith gasped, astonished.

"My dear," Mrs. Douglas replied, "I happen to possess a pair of eyes. I read it on the label, there, on your portmanteau."

"How much did it cost?" Faith cried, all aghast.

"I refuse to be questioned about my private correspondence," Mrs. Douglas answered firmly. "That's my affair. The telegram's mine, and sent in my own name. And now, dear, we've got to go out into the town and hunt about for our four-and-sixpenny lodging."

CHAPTER XIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"So what did you do, then?" Paul asked, two days later, as his sister and he sat hand-in-hand, comparing notes over their winter's adventures.

"So then," Faith went on, continuing her tale with unusual animation, "we ran about to two or three little places, to see which one would take us cheapest. And Mrs. Douglas—oh, she's a wonderful one at bargaining—you and I would never dare to do it. We wouldn't have the face to beat people down so. 'No,' she said, 'that won't suit us—we want bed and breakfast for half-a-crown,' and, you'll hardly believe it, at last she got it."

It was the luncheon-hour on the first day of Faith's return to the slavery of the infants; but Faith had not gone home for her mid-day meal. She had got Paul to bring it out to her in her father's tin, up to the Knoll—the heath-clad height that overhangs Hillborough, and from which the town derives its name. A little wooden summer-house, in form like a small Ionic temple, consisting only of a circular roof supported by heavy wooden columns, in the quaint bad taste of the eighteenth century, crowns the summit; and here, on that bright, frosty January morning, in spite of the cold, Faith preferred to eat her lunch undisturbed under the clear blue sky, in order to enjoy an uninterrupted interchange of confidences with her newly-returned brother. In the small houses of the labouring classes and the lesser *bourgeoisie à tête-à-tête* is impossible. People in that rank of life always go outdoors to say whatever they have most at heart to one another—a fact which explains much in their habits and manners whereat the unreflecting in the classes above them are apt to jeer beyond what is seemly. So, brusque as was the change to Paul from the lemon-groves of Mentone to the bare boughs and leafless trunks of the beeches and chestnuts on the Knoll at Hillborough, he was glad to embrace that

chance of outpouring his soul to his one intimate friend and confidante, his sister, in the roccoco summer-house on the open hill-top, rather than in the narrow little parlour at the ancestral abode of the Gascayne family.

"We couldn't have done it ourselves," Paul mused in reply. "But that's always the way with people who feel sure of their ground, Faith. They'll bargain and haggle ten times as much over a shilling as we will. You see, they're not afraid of losing caste by it."

"That's just it," Faith went on. "She was as bold as brass about it. 'Half a crown and not one penny more we pay,' she said, putting her little foot down smartly—just like this; 'and we don't want any supper; because, you see, Faith, you and I can sup in our own room, to save expense, off the remains of the sandwiches and the grouse and elaret.'"

"No! She didn't say that out loud before their very face!" Paul exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes, she did, before their very faces, my dear; and me there, just ready to drop at her side with shame and annoyance. But, Paul, she didn't seem to care a pin. She was as high and mighty as if she'd ordered a private room, with champagne and turtle. She held up her head like a thorough lady, and made me feel quite bold myself, merely by dint of her good example."

"And you slept together?" Paul asked.

"And we slept together," Faith answered. "She said she didn't mind a bit sharing the same room, though she would with some people, because I had blue blood—she was always talking that nonsense about blue blood, you know—and blue blood was akin all the world over. And I said I'd always understood, from the documents in the case, that mankind was made of one flesh, everywhere alike, no matter what might be the particular colour or quality of its circulating fluid; and, for my part, I didn't care a brass farthing whether her blood was blue, or pink, or yellow, or merely red like us common people; for she was a dear, good thing, anyhow, and I liked her ever so. And then she took my face between her hands, like this, and kissed me so hard, and said, 'Now we two are friends for good and always, so we'll talk no more nonsense about debatable questions.' And, Paul, she's really such a sweet, kind soul, I could almost forgive her for being such a dreadful aristocrat. Why, do you know, she says she pays everybody weekly, and never kept even a washerwoman waiting for her money, not a fortnight in her life, nor wouldn't, either."

"Well, you see, Faith," Paul answered, musing, "I expect the fact is, very often, they don't remember, and they've no idea what trouble they're causing. Perhaps we oughtn't to judge them too hardly."

"I judge them hardly," Faith cried, flushing up; "and so would you, if you'd the bills to make up, and had to go round to their very doors to ask them for the money. But Mrs.

to his one inti-
sister, in the
open hill-top,
parlour at the
family.

ourselves," Paul
always the way
their ground,
juggle ten times
will. You see,
be by it."

on. "She was
alf a crown and
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Douglas, she's quite another sort—she's quite different. You can't think how friendly we got together in that one evening. Though, to be sure, we lay awake the best part of the night, chattering away like a couple of magpies; and before morning we were much more intimate than I ever was with any other woman before in all my life. I think, perhaps—" And then Faith hesitated.

"You think, perhaps, it was because she was more like the sort of person you ought naturally to mix with," Paul suggested gently, reading with his quick sympathetic instinct her unuttered thought.

Faith faltered still.

"Well, perhaps so," she said. "More my equal—at least, in intelligence and feeling. Though I should be sorry to think, Paul," she added, after a pause, "I had more in common with the class that keeps people waiting for their money than with dear, good, honest, hardworking souls like father and mother."

"I don't think the classes need be mutually exclusive, as we say in logic," Paul mused slowly. "You see, I mix a good deal with both classes now; and it seems to me there may be good and bad in both about equally."

"Perhaps so. But the harm the one class does comes home to me, of course, a great deal more than the harm done by the other. They give me such a lot of bother about the bills: you wouldn't believe it. But Mrs. Douglas is a dear, I'm sure of that. She gave me *such* a kiss when she saw me off by the train next morning, and she said to me, 'Now, remember, Faith dear, I expect you to come in summer term and visit me at Oxford.'"

"At Oxford?" Paul cried, with a start of short-lived pleasure.

"Oh, yes; she was always going on about that the whole night through. She kept at it all the time; 'You must come to Oxford.' I'd happened to say to her earlier in the day, while we were in the train together, and before we got quite so intimate with one another, that I'd always had such a longing to see the University; and as soon as we'd begun to chum up a bit, you know, she said at once: 'Next summer term you must come and visit me at Oxford.' But it couldn't be managed, of course," Faith went on with a sigh. "The thing's beyond us. Though I couldn't make her understand how utterly impossible it was."

Paul's face fell.

"I suppose it *is* impossible," he murmured, disappointed. "You couldn't get the proper sort of clothes, I expect, to go and stop at Mrs. Douglas's, could you?"

"No," Faith answered very decisively. "I couldn't indeed. It may be wicked pride, but I'm woman enough to feel I won't go unless I can be dressed as well as all the others."

"It's a dreadful thing, Faith," Paul said, still holding her hand and looking away vaguely over the bare English landscape—so

painful a contrast to the green of Mentone; "it's a dreadful thing that I can't do anything in that way to help you. Now, any other brother, situated as I am, would be able to assist his sister a bit, and make her a little present of a dress and hat for such an occasion as that, for example. But I—I can't. Whatever I have is all Mr. Solomons'. I can't spend a single penny unnecessarily on myself or you without doing a wrong to him and father and you and mother. There's that tenner, now, I got from Thirsteton, for coaching him: under any other circumstances I'd be able to look upon that as my own to spend—I earned it myself—and to get you an evening dress (you'd want a simple evening dress, of course) to go to Oxford with. But I can't allow myself such a luxury as that. If I did, I'd have to get another tenner the more from Mr. Solomons, and sign for it at once, and burden my conscience, and father's, and yours, with another extra ten pounds, and all the interest."

"I sometimes think," Faith exclaimed petulantly, "we should all have been a great deal happier in our lives if we'd never heard of that dreadful Mr. Solomons!"

Paul took a more judicial view of the situation, as became his sex.

"I sometimes think so, too," he answered after a pause. "But, then, you've got to remember, Faith, that we, both of us, are what we are now wholly and solely through Mr. Solomons. We can't unthink so much of our past as to make ourselves mentally into what we might have been if Mr. Solomons had never at all crossed our horizon. We must recollect that if it hadn't been for Mr. Solomons I should never have gone either to the Grammar School or to Oxford. And if I'd never gone, you'd never have learnt all that you've learnt from me. You'd never even have become a teacher—now, would you? In a sort of way, Faith, you're now a lady, and I'm a gentleman. I know we are not what the big people at Hillborough would call gentlefolk; but in the only sense of the word that's worth anything we are; and that we are all depends upon Mr. Solomons. So being what we are, we can't say now what we would have wished things to be if we had been quite otherwise."

"That's a trifle metaphysical," Faith murmured, smiling. "I don't feel sure I follow it. But perhaps, after all, on the whole, I agree with you."

"Mr. Solomons is a factor you can't eliminate from our joint lives," Paul went on quietly; "and if we could eliminate him, and all that he implies, we'd not be ourselves. We'd be Tom and Mary Whitehead, if you understand me."

"You might be Tom, but I'd not be Mary," Faith answered with a not unbecoming toss of her head, for the Whiteheads, in point of fact, were her pet aversion. "The difference there

is something in the fibre. I suppose Mrs. Douglas would say it was blue blood; but, anyhow, I believe I'm not quite made of the same stuff as she is."

"Why, there you're as bad as Mrs. Douglas herself," Paul retorted, laughing. "Who was so precious democratic just now, I'd like to know, about all mankind and its varieties of circulating fluid?"

Faith laughed in return, but withdrew her hand. We all of us object to the prejudices of others, but our own little prejudices are so much more sensible, so much more firmly grounded on reasonable distinctions! We don't like to have them too freely laughed at.

"And this Yankee girl you were telling us about last night," Faith went on after a pause. "Was she very nice? As nice as she was rich? And did you and she flirt desperately together?"

Paul's smiling face grew suddenly grave.

"Well, Faith," he said, "to tell you the truth—you may think it an awfully presumptuous thing for a fellow like me to say, but I really believe it—if I were to take pains about going the right way to work, I might get that Yankee girl to say *Yes* to me."

"Most probably," Faith answered, quite undecomposed by this (to Paul) most startling announcement.

"You're laughing at me," Paul cried, drawing back a little sharply. "You think me a conceited prig for imagining it."

"Not at all," Faith replied, with supreme sisterly confidence in her brother's attractions. "On the contrary, I should think nothing on earth could be more perfectly natural. There's no reason, that I can see, why you need be so absurdly modest about your own position. You're tall, you're strong, you're well-built, you're good-looking, and though it's me that says it, as oughtn't to say it, you're every inch a gentleman. You've been well educated; you're an Oxford man, accustomed to mix with the best blood in England; you're cleverer than anybody else I ever met; and last of all, you're the heir to a baronetcy. Heaven knows I'm the least likely person in the world to over-estimate the worth or importance of *that*—but, after all, it always counts for something. If all those combined attractions aren't enough to bring down the American girl on her knees, where, for goodness' sake, does she expect to find her complete Adonis?"

"I wish I felt half as confident about myself as you do about me," Paul murmured, half ashamed.

"If you did, you wouldn't be half as nice as you are now, my dear. It's your diffidence that puts the *combs* on your perfections, as dear old Clarice would say. I'm so glad you saw her. She'd be so proud and delighted."

"And yet it was awkward," Paul said reflectively.

"I don't doubt it was awkward," his sister

replied. "It's always awkward to mix up your classes."

"I'm not so much ashamed," Paul went on with a sigh, "as uncomfortable and doubtful. It isn't snobbishness, I think, that makes me feel so; but, you see, you don't know how other people will treat them. And you hate having to be always obtruding on people whose whole ideas and sympathies and feelings are restricted to one class the fact that you yourself are just equally bound up with another. It seems like assuming a constant attitude of needless antagonism."

"Is she pretty?" Faith put in abruptly, not heeding his explanation.

"Who? Clarice? As pretty as ever, and not one day older."

"I didn't mean *her*," Faith interposed with a smile. "I mean the other one—the American."

"Oh, *her*! Yes, in her way, no doubt. Mignonne, slender, pallid, and golden-haired. She looks as if a breath would blow her away. Yet she's full of spirit, and cheek, and audacity, for all that. She said to me herself one day: 'I'm a little one, but, oh my!' and I'm sure she meant it. The man that marries her will have somebody to tackle."

"And do you like her, Paul?"

Paul looked up in surprise—not at the words, but at the impressive, half-regretful way in which they were spoken.

"No," he said. "Faith, if you ask me point-blank, she's a nice little girl—pretty, and all that sort of thing; but I don't care for her."

"And will you take pains about going the right way to make her say *Yes* to you?"

"Faith, how can you! I could never marry her. Rich as she is, and with all Mr. Solomons' bills at my back, I could never marry her."

There was a minute's pause. Then Faith said again, looking up in his face:

"So the revolt has come. It's come at last. I've been waiting for it, and expecting it. For months and months I've been waiting and watching. You've found yourself face to face with the facts at last, and your conscience is too strong for you. I knew it would be."

"The revolt has come," Paul answered, with an effort. "I found it out last week at Mentone, alone, and, in my own mind, it's all settled now. It's a terrible thing to have to say, Faith, and I've hardly worked out all it entails yet; but, come what may, I *can't* marry an heiress."

Faith said nothing, but she rose from her seat, and putting her two hands to his warm, red cheeks, kissed him soundly with sisterly fervour.

"I know what it means, Paul," she said, stooping over him tenderly. "I know what a struggle it must have cost you to make up your mind—you on whom it's been enjoined as a sort of sacred duty for so many years past by father and Mr. Solomons. But I knew,

when once you came to stand face to face with it, you'd see through the sham and dispel the illusion. You could never, never so sell yourself into slavery, and a helpless woman into gross degradation."

"It will kill father whenever I have to tell him," Paul murmured in return. "It will be the death-knell of all his hopes and ideals."

"But you needn't tell him—at present at least," Faith answered, wisely. "Put off the worst till you find it's inevitable. After all, it's only a guess that the American would take you. Most men don't marry at twenty-one. And you won't be twenty-one till to-morrow. You've years before you yet to make up your mind in. You can earn money meanwhile and repay it slowly. The disillusionment may come by slow degrees. There's no need to spring it upon him at one swoop, as you sprang it upon me unexpectedly this minute."

"I can never earn it; I can never repay it," Paul answered, despondently. "It's far too heavy a weight for a man to begin life upon. I shall sink under the burden, but I shall never get rid of it."

"Wait and see," Faith answered. "For the present, there's no need for saying anything. To-morrow Mr. Solomons will want you to sign your name afresh. But don't be foolish enough to tell him this. Why, good ess gracious, there's the bell! I must hurr' down at once. And how cold it is up here on the hill-top."

Halfway down the slope she turned and spoke once more.

"And the other girl," she said, "Nea Blair? The English one?"

"She's very, very nice," Paul answered, with warmth. "She's a really good girl. I like her immensely."

"Who is she?" Faith asked, in a tremulous voice.

"Her father's a clergyman, somewhere down in Cornwall."

"I should hate her," Faith cried. "I know I should hate her. I never can bear grand girls like that. If this is one of that sort, I know I should hate her. The American I could stand—their ways are not our ways; and we have the better of them in some things; but an Englishwoman like that, I know I could never, never endure her."

"I'm sorry," Paul answered. And he looked at her tenderly.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMING OF AGE OF THE HEIR TO THE TITLE.

NEXT morning was Paul's twenty-first birthday. For that important occasion he had hurried home to England three days before his term at Oxford began; for Mr. Solomons was anxious to bind him down firmly at the earliest possible moment to repay all the

sums borrowed on his account by his father during his infancy, from the very beginning. To be sure, they had all been expended on necessities, and if the sturdy infant himself would not pay, it would always be possible to fall back upon his father. But, then, what use was that as a security? Mr. Solomons asked himself. No, no; he wanted Paul's own hand and seal to all the documents hereinafter recapitulated, on the date of his coming of age, as a guarantee for future repayment.

The occasion, indeed, was celebrated in the Gascoyne household with all due solemnity. The baronet himself wore his Sunday best, with the carefully-brushed tall hat in which he always drove summer visitors to church in the Hillborough season; and at ten of the clock precisely he and Paul repaired, with a church-going air, as is the habit of their class (viewed not as a baronet, but as *petite bourgeoisie*) whenever a legal function has to be performed, to the dingy, stingy, gloomy-looking house where Mr. Solomons abode in the High Street of Hillborough.

Mr. Solomons, too, for his part, had risen in every way to the dignity of the occasion. He had to do business with a real live baronet and his eldest son; and he had prepared to receive his distinguished guests and clients with becoming hospitality. A decanter of brown sherry and a plate of plain cake stood upon the table by the dusty window of the estate agent's office; a bouquet of laurustinus and early forced wallflowers adorned the one vase on the wooden chimney-piece, and a fancy waistcoat of the most ornate design decorated Mr. Solomons' own portly person. Mr. Lionel, too, had come down from town to act as witness and general adviser, and to watch the case, so to speak, on his own behalf, as next-of-kin and heir-at-law to the person most interested in the whole proceeding. Mr. Lionel's hair was about as curly and as oleaginous as usual, but the flower in his button-hole was even nobler in proportions than was his wont on week-days, and the perfume that exhaled from his silk pocket-handkerchief was more redolent than ever of that fervid musk which is dear to the Oriental nervous organization.

"Come in, Sir Emery," Mr. Solomons observed, rubbing his hands with great unction, as the cab-driver paused for a second respectfully at his creditor's door. Mr. Solomons called his distinguished client plain Gascoyne on ordinary occasions when they met on terms of employer and cabman, but whenever these solemn functions of high finance had to be performed he allowed himself the inexpensive luxury of rolling that superfluous title for a special treat on his appreciative palate as a connoisseur rolls a good glass of burgundy.

Paul grew hot in the face at the unwelcome sound—for to Paul that hateful baronetcy had grown into a perfect *bête noire*—but Sir Emery advanced by shuffling steps with a

diffident air into the middle of the room, finding obvious difficulties as to the carriage of his hands, and then observed, in a very sheepish tone, as he bowed awkwardly:

"Good-day, Mr. Solomons, sir. Fine mornin', Mr. Lionel."

"It is a fine morning," Mr. Lionel condescended to observe in reply, with a distant nod; "but devilish cold, ain't it?" Then, extending his sleek white hand to Paul, with a more gracious salute, "How de do, Gascoyne? Had a jolly time over yonder at Mentono?"

For Mr. Lionel never forgot that Paul Gascoyne had been to Oxford and was heir to a baronetcy, and that, therefore, social capital might, as likely as not, hereafter be made out of him.

"Thank you," Paul answered, with a slight inclination of his head and a marked tone of distaste; "I enjoyed myself very much on the Riviera. It's a beautiful place, and the people were so very kind to me."

For Paul on his side had always a curious double feeling towards Lionel Solomons. On the one hand, he never forgot that Lionel was his uncle's nephew, and that once upon a time, when he played as a child in his father's yard, he used to regard Lionel as a very grand young gentleman indeed. And, on the other hand, he couldn't conceal from himself the patent fact, especially since he had mixed in the society of gentlemen on equal terms at Oxford, that Lionel Solomons was a peculiarly offensive kind of snob—the snob about town who thinks he knows a thing or two as to the world at large, and talks with glib familiarity about everyone everywhere whose name is bandied about in the shrill mouths of London gossip.

Mr. Solomons motioned Sir Emery graciously into a chair.

"Sit down, Paul," he said, turning to his younger client. "A glass of wine this cold morning, Sir Emery?"

"I thank you kindly, sir," the baronet responded, taking it up as he spoke. "'Ere's your very good 'ealth, Mr. Solomons, an' my respex to Mr. Lionel."

Mr. Solomons poured out a glass for Paul and then two more, in solemn silence, for himself and his nephew. The drinking of wine has a sort of serious ceremonial importance with certain persons of Mr. Solomons' character. After that he plunged for a while into general conversation on the atmospheric conditions and the meteorological probabilities for the immediate future—a subject which led round naturally by graceful steps to the political state of this kingdom, and the chances of a defeat for the existing Ministry over the Bill for the County Government of Dublin. Mr. Solomons considered it becoming on these State occasions not to start too abruptly on the question of business; a certain subdued delicacy of consideration for his clients' feelings made him begin the interview on the broader

and, so to speak, neutral basis of a meeting between gentlemen.

At last, however, when the sherry and the Ministry were both comfortably disposed of, and Sir Emery had signified his satisfaction and acquiescence in either process, Mr. Solomons dexterously and gracefully introduced the real subject before the house with a small set speech. "I think, Sir Emery," he said, putting his square bullet-head a little on one side, "you intimated just now that you wished to confer with me on a matter of business?"

"Yes, sir," the cab-driver answered, growing suddenly hot, and speaking with a visible effort of eloquence. "My son, Paul, as you know, sir, have come of age to-day, and it's our desire, Mr. Solomons, if-so-be-as it's skally convenient to you, to go together over them there little advances you've been kind enough to make from time to time for Paul's eddication, if I may so term it, to set 'em all right and straight, in the manner o' speaking, by gettin' Paul's own acknowledgment for 'em in black an' white, now he's no longer a minor but his own master."

It was a great triumph for the British baronet to stumble through so long a sentence unhurt, without a single halt, or a lapse of consciousness, and he felt justly proud when he got fairly to the end of it. Frequently as he had rehearsed it to himself in bed the night before, he never thought that when the moment for firing it off in actual practice really arrived he would have got pat through it all with such distinguished success.

Mr. Solomons smiled a smile of grateful recognition, and bowed, with one hand spread carelessly over his ample and expansive waistcoat. "If I've been of any service to you and your son, Sir Emery," he answered with humility, not untempered by conscious rectitude and the sense of a generous action well performed (at twenty per cent. interest, and incidentals), "I'm more than repaid, I'm sure, for all my time and trouble."

"And now," Mr. Lionel remarked, with a curl of his full Oriental lips, under the budding moustache, "let's get to business."

To business Mr. Solomons thereupon at once addressed himself with congenial speed. He brought from their pigeon-hole in the safe (with a decorous show of having to hunt for them first among his multifarious papers, though he had put them handy before his client entered) the bundle of acknowledgments tied up in pink tape, and duly signed, sealed, and delivered by Paul and his father. "These," he said, unfolding them with studious care, and recapitulating them one by one, "are the documents in the case. If you please, Mr. Paul"—he had never called him Mr. Paul before; but he was a free man now, and this was business—"we'll go over them together, and check their correctness."

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was anxious to shorten this unpleasant interview as much as possible; "will you just glance at their numbers, and see if they're accurate?"

But Mr. Solomons was not to be so put off. For his part, indeed, he was quite otherwise minded. This ceremony was to him a vastly agreeable one, and he was anxious rather to prolong it, and to increase the sense of its deep importance by every conceivable legal detail in his power.

"Excuse me," he said blandly, taking up the paper, and laying it open with ostentatious scrupulousness. "This is the law, and we must be strictly lawyer-like. Will you kindly look over the contents of this document, and see whether it tallies with your recollection?"

Paul took it up and resigned himself with a sigh to the unpleasant ordeal. "Quite right," he answered, handing it back formally.

"Will you be so good as to initial it on the back, then, with date as signed?" Mr. Solomons asked.

Paul did as he was bid, in wondering silence. Mr. Solomons took up the next in order, and then the third, and after that the fourth, and so on through all that hateful series of bills and renewals. Every item Paul acknowledged in solemn form, and each was duly handed over for inspection as he did so to Mr. Lionel, who also initialled them in his quality of witness.

At last the whole lot was fairly disposed of, and the dreadful total alone now stared Paul in the face with his blank insolvency. Then Mr. Solomons took from his desk yet another paper—this time a solemn document in due legal form, which he proceeded to read aloud in a serious tone and with deep impressiveness. Of "this indenture" and its contents Paul could only remember afterwards that it contained many allusions to Sir Emery Gascoyne, of Plowden's Court, Hillborough, in the County of Surrey, baronet, and Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, in the University of Oxford, gentleman, of the first part, as well as to Judah Prince Solomons, of High Street, Hillborough aforesaid, auctioneer and estate agent, of the second part; and that it purported to witness, with many unnecessary circumlocutions and subterfuges of the usual legal sort, to the simple fact that the two persons of the first part agreed and consented, jointly and severally, to pay the person of the second part a certain gross lump-sum, which, so far as human probability went, they had no sort of prospect or reasonable chance of ever paying. However, it was perfectly useless to say so to Mr. Solomons at that exact moment; for the pleasure which he derived from the perusal of the bond was too intense to permit the intervention of any other feeling. So when the document had been duly read and digested, Paul took up the pen and did as he was bid, signing opposite a small red wafer on the face of the instrument, and then remarking, as he

handed it back to Mr. Solomons, with his finger on the wafer, in accordance with instructions: "I deliver this as my act and deed"—a sentence which seemed to afford the person of the second part the profoundest and most obviously heartfelt enjoyment.

And well it might indeed, for no loophole of escape was left to Paul and his father anywhere. They had bound themselves down, body and soul, to be Mr. Solomons' slaves and journeymen hands till they had paid him in full for every stiver of the amount to the uttermost farthing.

When all the other signing and witnessing had been done, and Paul had covenanted by solemn attestations never to plead infancy, error, or non-indebtedness, Mr. Solomons sighed a sigh of mingled regret and relief as he observed once more:

"And now, Paul, you owe the seven-and-six for the stamp you'll notice."

Paul pulled out his purse and paid the sum demanded without a passing murmur. He had been so long accustomed to these constant petty exactions that he took them now almost for granted, and hardly even reflected upon the curious fact that the sum in which he was now indebted amounted to more than double the original lump he had actually received, without counting these perpetual minor drawbacks.

Mr. Solomons folded up the document carefully, and replaced it in its pigeon-hole in the iron safe.

"That finishes the past," he said; "there we've got our security, Leo. And for the future, Mr. Paul, is there any temporary assistance you need just now to return to Oxford with?"

A terrible light burst across Paul's soul. How on earth was he to live till he took his degree? Now that he had fully made up his mind that he couldn't and wouldn't marry an heiress, how could he go on accepting money from Mr. Solomons, which was really advanced on the remote security of that supposed contingency? Clearly, to do so would be dishonest and unjust. And yet, if he didn't accept it, how could he ever take his degree at all, and if he didn't take his degree, how could he possibly hope to earn anything anywhere, either to keep himself alive or to repay Mr. Solomons?

Strange to say, this terrible dilemma had never before occurred to his youthful intelligence. He had to meet it and solve it off-hand now, without a single minute for consideration.

It would not have been surprising, with the training he had had, if Paul, accustomed to live upon Mr. Solomons' loans, as most young men live upon their father's resources, had saved his conscience by this clear plea of necessity, and had decided that to take his degree, anyhow, was of the first importance, both for himself and Mr. Solomons.

But he didn't. In an instant he had thought all these things over, and being now a man and a free agent, had decided in a flash what course of action his freedom imposed upon him.

With trembling lips he answered firmly: "No, thank you, Mr. Solomons; I've enough in hand for my needs for the present." And then he relapsed into troubled silence.

What followed he hardly noticed much. There was more political talk, and more sherry all round, with plum-cake accompaniment and serious faces. And then they rose to leave, Paul thinking to himself that now the crisis had come at last, and he could never return to his beloved Oxford. Those three years of his life would all be thrown away. He must miss his degree—and break his father's heart with the disappointment.

But Sir Emery observed, as he reached the open air, rubbing his hands together in the profundity of his admiration: "E's a rare clever chap, to be sure, is Mr. Solomons. Barr and Wilkie ain't nothin' by the side of him. Why, 'e read them documents out aloud so as no lawyer couldn't 'a drawn 'em up better."

And Mr. Lionel, within, was observing to his uncle: "Well, you *are* a simple one, and no mistake, to let that fellow Gascayne see where you keep his acknowledgments! For my part, I wouldn't trust any man alive to know where I keep any papers of importance."

CHAPTER XV.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY.

WHEN Paul got home, he put his dilemma, at lunch time, before Faith, who went out with him once more on the knots to discuss it.

"And what do you mean to do now?" Faith asked, as soon as he had finished outpouring his difficulties into her sympathetic ear. "Anyhow, you *must* go back to Oxford."

"I can't," Paul answered, shortly; "I've no money to go with."

"You've Thistleton's tenner," Faith replied, with simple straightforwardness, unconscious of the impropriety of such language on the lips of the female instructor of youth; for she had seen so little of anybody but Paul, that Paul's phrases came naturally to the tip of her tongue whenever she discussed the things that pertain to men, and more especially to Oxford. "That'll pay your way up and settle you in, at any rate."

"But my battels!" Paul objected. "I won't have anything to meet my battels with."

Faith was too well up in University language not to be well aware by this time that "battels" are the college charges for food, lodging, sundries, and tuition; so she made no bones about that technical phrase, but answered boldly:

"Well, the battels must take care of themselves; they won't be due till the beginning of next term, and meanwhile you can live on tick—as all the big people do at Hillborough—can't you?"

"Faith!" Paul cried, looking down into her face aghast. "*Et tu, Brute!* You who always pitch into them so for not paying their little bills promptly!"

"Oh, I don't really mean that!" Faith answered, colouring up, and somewhat shcked herself at her own levity in this fall from grace; for, to Faith, the worst of all human sins was living on credit. "I only meant—can't you try to get some more private pupils in the course of term-time, and stand your chance at the end of being able to pay your battels?"

Paul reflected profoundly.

"It's a precious poor chance," he responded, with perfect frankness. "There aren't many fellows who care to read nowadays with an undergraduate. And, besides, it spoils a man's own prospects for his examinations so much, if he has to go teaching and reading at once—driving two teams abreast, as learner and tutor."

"It does," Faith answered. "That's obvious, of course. But, then, you've got to do something, you know, to keep the ball rolling."

It's a great thing for a man to have an unpractical woman to spur him on. It makes him boldly attempt the impossible. So in the end, after much discussing of *pros* and *cons* between them, it was finally decided that Paul must go up to Oxford, as usual, and do his best to hang on somehow for the present. If the worst came to the worst, as Faith put it succinctly, he must make a clean breast of it all to Mr. Solomons. But if not, he might manage by hook or by crook to earn enough money to pull through two terms; for in two terms more he would take his degree, and then he might really begin to work for money.

It was a desperate attempt—how desperate those only know who have themselves been through it. But Paul resolved to try, and the resolve itself had in it a gentle touch of the heroic.

Next day, in fact, he bade farewell to Faith and his mother, and returned with his ten-pound note to Oxford. Ten pounds is a slender provision for a term's expenses, but it would enable him at least to look about him for the moment, and see what chances arose of taking pupils.

And, indeed, that very night fortune favoured him, as it sometimes favours those forlorn hopes of work-a-day heroes. To his great surprise, Thistleton came round, after all, to his rooms, to ask if Paul would take him on for the term as a private pupil.

"It's to read, this time," he explained, with his usual frankness, "not to satisfy the governor. I really must get through my 'Mods' at last, and, if I don't look sharp, I shall be 'ploughed' again, and that'd set the governor's back up, so that he'd cut my allowance, for he won't stand my falling again, the governor won't, that's certain."

With great joy, therefore, Paul consented to take him on for the term, and so double that modest tennor.

Thistleton stopped talking long and late in his friend's rooms, and about twelve o'clock one of those confidential fits came over Paul, which are apt to come over young men, and others, when they sit up late into the small hours of the morning over the smouldering embers of a dying fire. He had impressed upon Thistleton more than once already the absolute need for his making a little money, and his consequent desire to obtain pupils; and Thistleton in return had laughingly chaffed him about those mysterious claims to which Paul was always so vaguely alluding. Then Paul had waxed more confidential and friendly still, and had imparted to Thistleton's sympathetic ear the fact that, if he didn't succeed in earning his own living for the next two terms, he would be obliged to leave Oxford without taking his degree at all, and so cut off all hope of making a livelihood in future and satisfying the mysterious claims in question.

"How so?" Thistleton asked; and Paul answered him in guarded phrase that his means of subsistence had since his return from Mentone been suddenly and quite unexpectedly cut from under him.

"What! The respected bart.'s not dead, is he?" the blonde young man asked, opening his big blue eyes as wide as he could open them.

Paul replied, with a somewhat forced smile, that the respected bart. still continued to walk this cold earth, and that his disappearance, indeed, from this mortal scene would have produced very little effect one way or the other upon his son's fortunes.

Then Thistleton grew more curious and inquisitive still, and Paul more confidential; till the end of it all was that Paul gradually unfolded to his friend the whole of Mr. Solomons' scheme for his education and future life, with the financial details of yesterday's indenture, and the supposed way in which he was himself to discharge thereafter those serious obligations.

When Thistleton heard the entire story, he would have laughed outright had it not been for the obvious seriousness of Paul's dilemma. To borrow money on the strength of a prospective heiress unknown was really too ridiculous. But as soon as he began fully to grasp the whole absurd incident, its graver as well as its more comic aspects, his indignation got the better of his amusement at the episode. He declared roundly, in very plain terms, that Mr. Solomons, having taken Paul's life into his own hands while Paul was yet too young to know good from evil, and having brought Paul up like a gentleman, at Oxford, was clearly bound to see the thing through to the bitter end—at least, till Paul had taken his degree, and was, therefore, in a position to earn his own livelihood.

"If I were you, Gascoyne," the blonde

young man asserted vigorously (with an unnecessary expletive, here suppressed), "I wouldn't have the very slightest compunction in the world in taking his money for the next two terms, and then tell him right out he might whistle for his cash till you were able and ready to pay him back again. It's his own fault entirely if he's made a bad investment on a grotesque security. At least, that's how we'd look at the matter in Yorkshire."

"I think," Paul answered, with that gravity beyond his years that fate had forced upon him, "if it were somebody else's case I was judging instead of my own, I should judge as you do, either in Yorkshire or elsewhere. I should say a fellow wasn't bound by acts imposed upon him, as it were, by his father or others, before he arrived at years of discretion. But then, when I was asked to sign those papers yesterday, if I were going to protest at all, that was the moment when I ought to have protested. I ought to have plainly said, 'I'll sign for the money, if you'll go on finding me in ready cash till I take my degree'—but, mind, I don't engage to do anything in the world to catch an heiress.' Only I hadn't the courage to say so then and there. You see, it's been made a sort of religious duty for me, through all my life, to marry for money; and if I'd blurted out my refusal point-blank like that, I'm afraid my father would have been grieved and annoyed at it."

"I expect my governor's grieved and annoyed at a great many things I do," Thistleton retorted with the unruffled philosophical calm of one-and-twenty—where others are concerned. "It don't pay to be too tender to the feelings of fathers, you see; it gives them too high and mighty an idea of their own importance. Fathers in any case are apt to magnify their office overmuch, and it would never do for sons as well to pamper them. But, after all, I don't know why you need have spoken at all, nor why you shouldn't go on accepting this old buffer's assistance and support, with a quiet conscience, till you take your degree. When one looks it in the face, you don't know that you won't marry an heiress. Accidents *will* happen, you see, even in the best regulated families. It's just as easy, if it comes to that, to fall in love with a girl with five thousand a year as with a girl who hasn't a penny to bless herself with. If the five thousand pounder's pretty and nice, like that Yankee at Mentone with the mamma in tow, I should say, on the whole, it's a great deal easier."

"Not for me," Paul answered, with the prompt fervour born of recent internal debate on this very question. "I can understand that another fellow, who hadn't been brought up to look out for money, might fall in love with a girl with money quite as easily as with a girl without any. He has no prejudice one way or the other. But in my case it's different. The very fact that the money's been so

much insisted upon for me, and that part of it would go to pay Mr. Solomons"—Paul never even thought of calling his creditor anything less respectful than "Mr. Solomons" even to his nearest acquaintance—"would suffice to prevent me from falling in love with money. You see, falling in love's such a delicately balanced operation! If I married money at all, it'd be simply and solely because I married for money, not because I fell in love with it; and I could never take any woman's money to pay the debt incurred beforehand for my own education. I should feel as if I'd sold myself to her, and was her absolute property."

Thistleton stirred the fire meditatively, with his friend's poker.

"It is awkward," he admitted unwillingly—"devilish awkward, I allow. I say, Gascoyne, how much about does it cost you to live for a term here?"

"Oh, an awful lot of money," Paul answered, much downcast, staring hard at the embers. "Nct much short of fifty pounds on an average."

Thistleton looked across at him with a broad smile of surprise. "Fifty pounds!" he echoed. "You don't mean to say, my dear fellow, you manage to bring it down to fifty pounds, do you?"

Well, for summer term especially I do, when there are no fires to keep up," Paul answered soberly. "But spring term comes rather heavy sometimes, I must say, because of the cold and extra clothing."

Thistleton looked for some time at the fire, staring harder than ever with blank astonishment. "Gascoyne," he said at last in a very low tone, "I'm clean ashamed of myself."

"Why, my dear boy?"

"Because I spend at least five times as much as that on an average."

"Ah, but then you've got five times as much to spend, you know. That makes all the difference."

Thistleton paused and ruminated once more. How very unevenly things are arranged in this world! He was evidently thinking how he could word a difficult proposition for their partial readjustment. Then he spoke again: "I could easily cut my own expenses down fifty quid this term," he said, "if you'd only let me lend it to you. I'm sure I wouldn't feel the loss in any way. The governor's behaved like a brick this winter."

Paul shook his head. "Impossible," he answered with a despondent air. "It's awfully good of you, Thistleton, awfully kind of you to think of it; but as things stand, of course I couldn't dream of accepting it."

"It wouldn't make the slightest difference in the world to me," Thistleton went on persuasively. "I assure you, Gascoyne, my governor 'd never feel or miss fifty pounds one way or the other."

"Thank you ever so much," Paul answered with genuine gratitude. "I know you mean

every word you say, but I could never by any possibility take it, Thistleton."

"Why not, my dear boy?" the blonde young man said, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Because, in the first place, it's your father's money, not yours, you propose to lend, and I couldn't accept it; but also in the second place, which is far more important, I haven't the very slightest chance of ever repaying you."

"Repaying me!" Thistleton echoed with a crestfallen air. "Oh, dash it all, Gascoyne, I never thought of your really repaying me, of course, you know. I meant it as an offer of pure accommodation."

Paul laughed in spite of himself. "That sort of loan," he said, taking his friend's hand in his and wringing it warmly, "is usually called by another name. Seriously, Thistleton, I couldn't think of taking it from you. You see, I've no right to pay anybody else till I've repaid the last farthing I owe to Mr. Solomons; and to borrow money on the chance of repaying it at such a remote date—say somewhere about the Greek Kalends—would be downright robbery."

A bright idea seized suddenly upon Thistleton. "By Jove!" he cried, "I'll tell you how we'll manage it. It's as easy as pap. You can't lose either way. You know that prize essay you were mugging away at all the time we were at Montone—'The Influence of the Renaissance on Modern Thought,' wasn't it?—ah, yes, I thought so. Well, how much would you get, now, if you happened to win it?"

"Fifty pounds," Paul answered. "But, that's so very improbable."

"Awfully improbable," his friend echoed warmly with profound conviction. "That's just what I say. You haven't a chance. You ought to back yourself to lose, don't you see; that's the way to work it. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you ten to one in fivers you win. And you put a fiver on the chance you don't. Then—'don' you catch on?' as the Yankee girl used to say—you stand to come out pretty even either way. Suppose you get the prize, you earn fifty pounds, out of which you owe me a fiver—that leaves forty-five to the good, doesn't it? But suppose you lose, I owe you fifty. So, you see, you clear pretty nearly the same lot whichever turns up. I call that good hedging." And the blonde young man leant back in his chair with a chuckle at his own ingenuity.

Paul smiled again. The blonde young man seemed so hugely delighted at the cleverness of his own device that he was really loth to be compelled to disillusion him. "Your adroitness in trying to find a way to make me a present of fifty pounds under a transparent disguise really touches me," he said with a faint tremor in his voice; "but don't think about it any more, you dear, good fellow. It's

quite impossible. I must try to make it up myself with pupils and economy, and back my chances for the prize essay. If at the end of the term I'm still to the bad, I'll put the matter fairly before Mr. Solomons. Whether I stay up one term longer and take my degree or not must then depend upon what he thinks best for his own interest. After all, my whole future's mortgaged to him already, and it's more his affair than mine in the end what becomes of me."

"Why, I call it downright slavery!" Thistleton exclaimed warmly. "I think it ought to be prohibited by Act of Parliament. It's a great deal worse than the chimney boys and the indentured labourers. I only wish I'd got that beastly old Jew with his head in chancery here under my arm this very minute. By George, sir, wouldn't I just punch it as flat as a pancake in rather less than no time!"

"I think," Paul answered with a smile, "punching his head flat would do me very little permanent good. Indeed, in his own way he really means me well. He's bound us down by all the terrors of the law to his percentages and his policies; but I believe he considers himself my benefactor for all that."

"Benefactor be blowed!" Thistleton responded, rising with North Country vehemence. "If I could only see the old blackguard in college to-night, it'd give me the sincerest pleasure in life to kick him a dozen times round Tom Quad till he roared for mercy."

CHAPTER XVI.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE.

In spite of Paul's fears, however, that dreaded spring term went off most happily. To be sure, he had to work for his bread like a London cab-horse (as Sir Emery loved professionally to phrase it), but Paul had never been afraid of hard work, and as long as he could make both ends meet somehow, and avoid running into further debt with Mr. Solomons, he was amply satisfied. And that spring term he got as many pupils as he could possibly find time for. The reason for this sudden run upon his tutorial powers was, of course, the usual one which accounts for all successes and failures in life—a woman's wire-pulling. It is a mistake to think this world is mainly run by men. Genius, talent, industry, capacity—nay, even the invaluable quality of unscrupulousness itself—are as dust in the balance as a means to success compared with the silent, unobtrusive, backstairs influence of the feminine intelligence. A woman's wit is worth the whole lot of them.

And this valuable ally in the struggle for life Paul managed to secure almost without knowing it.

For two days after his return to The House (as Christ Church men insist upon calling their college) Paul received a little note from Faith's

new friend, Mrs. Douglas, inviting him to drink afternoon tea at her house in the Parks—the fashionable tutorial suburb of modern married Oxford.

The Parks, in fact, which are the natural outcome of the married Fellow system, have completely revolutionized the Oxford we all knew and loved in our own callow undergraduate period. In those monastic ages the Fellow who married lost his Fellowship; the presence of women in the University was unknown; and even the stray intrusion of a sister or cousin into those stern gray quads was severely frowned upon by ascetic authority. But nowadays, under the new petticoat régime, all that is changed: the Senior Tutor lives in a comfortable creeper-clad villa in the Parks; his wife gives lunches and afternoon teas; and his grown-up daughters play tennis with the men, and belong to the University just as much as the average undergraduate—or even in virtue of their fixity of tenure a little more so. Mrs. Senior Tutor (with marriageable girls) is quite as anxious to catch the eligible undergraduate for her own dance in Commemoration week as any Belgravian mamma in all London; and the Rev. the Bursar himself smiles benignly while scholars and exhibitioners waste the shining hours in flirtation and punts on the banks of the Cherwell. Things were not so ordered *Consule Plancio*, when Leighton was Vice-Chancellor. But as everybody seems satisfied with the existing system—especially the Senior Tutor's daughters—there can be little doubt that all is for the best in the best of all possible Universities, and that flirting, so far from distracting the heads of students, as the older school devoutly believed, is in reality a powerful spur on the mind of the youth to the acquisition of classical and mathematical knowledge.

To this new microcosm of the Parks and their inhabitants, Mrs. Douglas played the part of centre of gravity. Round her as primary the lesser orbs of that little system revolved in their various subordinate places. Not that Mrs. Douglas herself was either rich or pretentious. The Accadial professor's stipend consisted of the modest interest on a sum in Reduced Two-and-three-quarters per Cent. Consols, which he supplemented only by private means of the smallest, and by a very moderate income from his wife's family.

But Mrs. Douglas had the invaluable quality of being able to "hold her *salon*"; and being, besides, an earl's niece, she had rapidly grown into the principal wire-puller and recognised leader of Oxford tutorial Society. With that greater world where the heads of houses move serene in placid orbits, indeed, she interfered but little; but the Parks acknowledged her away without a murmur, as the representative of authority in its most benign avatar. For Mrs. Douglas had tact, sense, and kindness; she was truly sympathetic to a very high degree, and she would put herself out to serve

a friend in a way that was sure to attract the friend's warmest gratitude. Moreover, she was a woman, and therefore skilled in the feminine art of mounting the back-stairs with address and good-humour. This combination of qualities made her vastly loved and admired in Oxford by all save those unfortunate people whom her kindly machinations often succeeded in keeping out of posts for which they possessed every qualification on earth except the one needful one of Mrs. Douglas's friendship. But drawbacks like this are, of course, incidental to every possible system of "influence" in government.

Now, things had made this powerful and good-natured lady particularly anxious to know and serve Paul Gascoyne. In the first place, she had been deeply interested in his sister Faith, whose curious character had engaged her sympathy at once, and with whom their one night at the country hotel together had made her suddenly quite intimate. In the second place, on her return to Oxford, she had found a letter awaiting her from Nea Blair, her little Cornish friend, which contained some casual mention of a certain charming Christ Church man, a Mr. Gascoyne, who had created quite a puzzle of Mentone society by his singular mixture of pride and humility. Well, if Mrs. Douglas had a fault, it was that of taking too profound an interest in the fancies and fortunes of young people generally. Her husband, indeed, was wont to aver that, after Bryant and May, she was the greatest matchmaker in all England. Something in Nea Blair's letter—some mere undertone of feeling, that only a clever woman would ever have guessed at—suggested to Mrs. Douglas's quick instincts the idea that Nea Blair was more than commonly interested in Paul Gascoyne's personality and prospects. That alone would have been enough to make Mrs. Douglas anxious to meet and know Paul; the accident of her chance acquaintance with Faith in the commodious horse-box made her doubly anxious to be of use and service to him.

So when Paul duly presented himself at the eligible creeper-clad villa in the Parks, to drink tea with the wife of the Accadian professor, Mrs. Douglas drew out of him by dexterous side-pressure the salient fact that he was anxious to find private pupils, or otherwise to increase his scanty income. And having once arrived at a knowledge of that fact, Mrs. Douglas made it her business in life for the next ten days to scour all Oxford in search of men who wanted to read for "Mods." with a private tutor, going out into the very high-ways and by-ways of the University, so to speak, and compelling them to come in with truly Biblical fortitude.

But when once Mrs. Douglas took a thing in hand, it was well known to the Chancellor, masters, and scholars of the University of Oxford that, sooner or later, she meant to

get it done; and that the Chancellor, masters, and scholars aforesaid might, therefore, just as well give in at once, without unnecessary trouble, bother, or expense, and let her have her way as soon as she asked for it.

"Going in for 'Mods.' in June?" Mrs. Douglas would remark, with a sigh of pity, to the unhappy undergraduate of limited brains, fixing her mild brown eyes upon him with an air of the profoundest sympathy and friendly assistance. "Then you'll want to read up your books this term with a private coach or somebody, of course;" and when the unhappy undergraduate of limited brains, falling readily into the trap thus baited for his destruction, admitted abstractedly, in a general way, that a little tutorial assistance of a friendly sort would, perhaps, be not wholly unsuited to his intellectual needs, Mrs. Douglas, fixing her mild brown eyes still more firmly than ever upon his trembling face, would nail him to his admission at once by responding cheerfully, "Then I know the very man that'll suit your book just down to the ground. Mr. Gascoyne, of Christ Church, has a great many pupils reading with him this term, but I dare say I could induce him to make room for you somehow. My husband thinks very highly of Mr. Gascoyne. He's a capital coach. If you want to get through with flying colours, he's just the right man to pull you out of the moderator's clutches. That's his card in my basket there; don't forget the name: 'Gascoyne, of Christ Church, first pair right, number six, Peckwater.' Yes, one of the great Gascoyne people down in Pembrokeshire—that's the very family. I'm glad you know them. His father's the precent baronet, I believe, and his sister's coming up to see me next Commemoration. If you like you can take his card to remember the name by; and when Mr. Gascoyne comes again on Sunday, I'll make a point of asking him whether you've been to call upon him about reading for 'Mods.' or not, and I'll tell him (as you're a most particular friend of mine) to be sure to pay you every possible attention.

When a clove: and good-looking woman of thirty-five, who happens to be also a professor's wife flings herself upon an unhappy undergraduate of limited brains in that dashing fashion, with a smile that might soften the heart of a stone, what on earth can the unhappy undergraduate do in self-defence but call at once upon Gascoyne of Christ Church, and gratefully receive his valuable instructions? Whence it resulted that, at the end of a fortnight, Gascoyne of Christ Church had as many pupils as he could easily manage (at ten pounds a head), and saw his way clearly to that term's expenses, about which he had so despaired a few days before with Faith at Hillborough.

A woman of Mrs. Douglas's type is the most useful ally a man can find in life. Make friends with her, young man, wherever met; and be sure she will be worth to you a great

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deal more than many hundred men at the head of your profession.

One further feat of Mrs. Douglas's the candid historian blushes to repeat; yet, in the interest of truth, it must needs be recorded.

For when, a fortnight later, Mrs. Douglas gave her first dinner-party of the term, she took occasion, in the drawing-room, about ten of the clock, to draw aside the Senior Proctor confidentially for a moment, and murmur in his ear:

"I think, Mr. Wayles, you're one of the examiners for the Marlborough Historical Essay, aren't you?"

The Senior Proctor, a grim, close-shaven man, with firm-set lips and a very clerical mouth and collar, signified his assent by a slight bow of acquiescence, and a murmured reply of:

"I believe my office entails upon me that among other honours."

Mrs. Douglas assumed her most bewitching smile.

"Now, dear Mr. Wayles," she said, bending over towards him, coquettishly, "you mustn't really be angry with me. I'm only a woman, you know, and we women have always our little plots and conspiracies on hand, haven't we? I'm very much interested in a particular essay which bears for motto the words, '*Non jam prima peto Mnætheus neque vincere certo, Quamquam O!*' There, you see, though I was dragged up before Girtton and Newnham were invented, you didn't know before I could spout out a Latin hexameter as prettily as that, did you? Well, I want you *most particularly* to read over that identical essay with special attention, *very special* attention, and if you find it in *every* respect in *mensely* better than all the rest put together, to recommend it to the kind attention of your colleagues."

The Senior Proctor—that grim, close-shaven man—allowed just the faintest ghost of a smile of amused pity to pucker the corners of his very clerical mouth, as he answered with official succinctness:

"Every essay alike, my dear Mrs. Douglas, will receive at my hands, and I believe I may venture to say at those of my brother-examiners also, the most impartial consideration; and nothing that can be said to us by any outside person—even yourself—can have the very *slightest* influence upon us in making our award to the most deserving competitor."

"Oh, of course," Mrs. Douglas answered, with that most bewitching smile once more well to the front. "I know and understand all that *perfectly*. I haven't lived so long in the University as dear Archie's wife without having learnt how *absolutely useless* it is to try to pull any wires or go up any backstairs in University business. I only meant to say if you find that essay *quite undeniably* the very best, I hope you won't let the fact of my recommendation tell strongly against it."

The Senior Proctor had an uncomfortable

sense that when Mrs. Douglas laid so profound a stress upon the words "absolutely useless" that irreverent little woman was actually trying to chaff him or to laugh in her sleeve; and as the Senior Proctor represents before the world the dignity and majesty of the University in its corporate capacity, so wicked an attempt on her part to poke fun at his office would, no doubt, have merited condign punishment. But he only bowed once more a sphinx-like bow, and answered severely, "All the essays alike shall have my best attention."

Now, we all of us know, of course—we who are men and women of the world—that the Senior Proctor spoke the exact truth, and that in matters so important as University prizes no shadow of partiality can ever be suspected among English gentlemen. (If it were, we might all be tempted to think that English gentlemen were not, after all, so very superior in kind as we know them to be to the members of every other European nationality.) Nevertheless, it must be noted, as a single and unaccountable historical fact, that when the Senior Proctor—that lone, bachelor man—went home that night along the cold, gray streets to his solitary rooms in Fellows Quad, Merton, and saw a big bundle of Marlborough Prize Essays lying on his table unopened for his deep consideration, his mouth relaxed for a moment into a distinctly human smile as he thought of the delicate pressure of her hand with which Mrs. Douglas—charming woman, to be sure, Mrs. Douglas!—had bid him good-night, with a last whispered adieu of "Now, don't forget, Mr. Wayles: '*Non jam prima peto Mnætheus neque vincere certo.*'" How delicious Virgil sounded, to be sure, on those red ripe lips! Had she learnt that verse by heart, he wondered, on purpose to bamboozle him? So thinking, and gloating over that dainty pressure, the Senior Proctor flung himself into his easy chair, before his goodly fire, kicked off his boots and ended himself in his woollen-lined slippers, fortified his intellect with a brandy-and-soda from the syphon at his side, lighted one of Bacon's best cigars, and proceeded, with his feet on the fender comfortably, to address his soul in indulgent mood to the task of literary and historical criticism.

But, strange to say, he did not take up the very first essay that came to hand, as a conscientious Proctor might fairly be expected to do. On the contrary, he turned them all over one by one with deliberate finger till he came to a roll of neat white foolscap, legibly inscribed in a bold, black hand—I blush to narrate it—with that very Virgilian motto which treacherous Mrs. Douglas had been at such pains to get by rote, without one false quantity, and to fire off, unappalled, against his grim clerical mouth and collar. He read the essay through first with close attention; then he wrote down on a small sheet of paper

at his side the mystic letters "v. g.," supposed to stand for "very good" in our own vernacular. By the time he had read it through, the hour was advanced, and a second brandy-and-soda and a second cigar were needed to stimulate the critical faculty. As time went on, it must be frankly admitted, those essays got shorter and shorter shrift, while the soda got deeper and deeper doses of brandy, until by the time the clock marked three, the Senior Proctor rose with dignity, drained the remainder of his last tall tumbler, and sticking all the papers in the desk for read, strolled off to his bedroom unmistakably sleep.

Now, it must not be concluded from this veracious account that Paul Gascoyne's essay was not in all probability, on its own merits, the very best of the entire lot submitted for judgment, nor that Mrs. Douglas had exerted on its behalf anything which could be described by the most severe moralist as undue influence. In fact, have we not already recorded the Senior Proctor's emphatic and deliberate assertion to the contrary? And was not that assertion again renewed? For when a fortnight later Mrs. Douglas ventured to thank the dignitary in question (as she irreverently phrased it), "for backing her man for the Marlborough Prize," the Senior Proctor, opening his eyes wide in his very grimmest fashion, replied with an innocent air of surprise:

"Oh, so the successful candidate was the person you spoke about, Mrs. Douglas, was he? Well, I'm sure, we had none of us the very faintest idea of it."

But, nevertheless, it is a historical fact, not to be blinked at, that when the Senior Proctor passed on the papers to his brother examiners for consideration, Paul Gascoyne's essay went on top, marked in plain words, "*Optime meritis est.*—P.H.W.," and it is equally certain that the other examiners, glancing hastily over them with an uncritical eye, one and all endorsed Mr. Wayles' opinion. From which facts it may be gathered that, though Paul Gascoyne's Marlborough Essay was really and truly one of the most brilliant ever submitted to the Board of Examiners, and, though favouritism of any kind is unknown at Oxford, it is none the less a very useful thing to have a Mrs. Douglas of your own on hand to say a good word for you whenever convenient.

But Paul had no idea of all these hidden springs of action in the Senior Proctor and his esteemed colleagues when a week or so before the end of the term he read, all trembling, a notice posted on the door of the schools:

"The Board of Examiners for the Marlborough Historical Essay, Chichele Foundation, have awarded the Prize of Fifty Guineas to Paul Gascoyne, Commoner of Christ Church."

His heart beat high as he read those words, and his knees reeled under him. So next term, at least, was safe from Mr. Solomons!

CHAPTER XVII.

REVOLUTIONARY SCHEMES.

NEVERTHELESS, it was not without great damage to his own ultimate chances of future success that Paul had secured this momentary triumph. He was able to write back to Hillborough, it is true, and assure Mr. Solomons he had no further need of assistance for the present; but he had lost almost a whole term, so far as his own reading for the Greats Schools was concerned, in that valiant spurt at private pupils. His prospects of a First were far more remote now than ever before, for a man can't support himself by teaching others, and at the same time read hard enough in his spare hours to enter into fair competition with his peers who have been able to devote their undivided energies to their own education. He had handicapped himself heavily in the race for honours. Paul ruefully realized this profound truth when he began to work on his own account in the Easter vacation and summer term. He had a great deal of leeway still to make up if he were to present himself in a well-prepared condition before the searching scrutiny of those dreaded examiners. And on the issue of the examination depended, in large measure, his chance of obtaining a Fellowship, with the consequent possibility of earning a livelihood, and sooner or later repaying Mr. Solomons.

Spring and the Easter vacation wore away, and summer term came back to Oxford. The new green foliage dawned once more on the chestnuts by the Cherwell. The University blossomed out into punts and flannels; laburnums and pink may glorified the parks; ices were in brisk demand at Cooper's in the High; and the voice of the sister was heard in the tennis-courts, eagerly criticising the fraternal service. It was all as delightful and as redolent of youth, fizz, and syllabus as Oxford knows how to be, in full leaf and in warm June weather. And Paul Gascoyne, working hard for Greats in his rooms in Peckwater, was nevertheless able to snatch many an afternoon for a pull in a four down the river to Newnham, or for a long stroll round Cumnor and Shotover with his friend Thistleton. Even the shadow of an approaching examination, and the remote prospect of being Mr. Solomons' bond-slave for half a life-time cannot quite kill out in the full heart of youth the glory of the green leaf and the fresh vigour of an English spring-tide.

About those days, one morning down at Hillborough, Faith Gascoyne, sitting in the window where the clematis looked into her small bare bedroom, heard a postman's double knock at the door below, and rushed down in haste to take the letters. There was only one, but that was enclosed in a neat square envelope, of better quality than often came to Plowden's Court, and bearing on the flap a crest and monogram in delicate neutral colour. It was

addressed to herself, and bore the Oxford post-mark. Faith guessed at once from whom it must have come; but none the less she tore it open with quivering fingers and read it eagerly:

"MY DEAR FAITH," it began, for that night at the country inn had made Mrs. Douglas feel quite at home with the Northern Schoolmistress, "I hope you haven't altogether forgotten your implied promise to come and see me at Oxford this term."

'How can she say so,' thought Faith, 'the wicked thing, when I told her again and again a dozen times over it was absolutely impossible?' But that was part of Mrs. Douglas's insinuating cleverness.

"Well, my dear little Cornish friend, Nea Blair, who met your brother Paul at Mentone last winter, and was so charmed with him, is coming up to stay with us the week after next; and as I think it would be nicer for both you girls to have a little society of your own age, so as not to be entirely dependent on an old married woman like me for entertainment, I want you to manage so that your visit may coincide with hers, and then, you know, the same set of festivities will do for both of you. Now, isn't that economical? So mind you don't disappoint us, as dozens of undergraduates who have seen the photo you gave me are dying to make your personal acquaintance, and some of them are rich, and as beautiful as Adonis. Please recollect I'll stand no excuses, and least of all any that have any nonsense in them. Write by return, and tell me, not whether you can come or not—that's settled already—but by what train on Wednesday week we may expect to see you. Mr. Douglas will go down to the station to bring you up. No refusal allowed."

"Ever yours affectionately,
"ELEANOR MARY DOUGLAS."

Then came a peculiarly fetching .S.:

"As I have some reason to believe your brother Paul has a sneaking regard for my little friend Nea, I think it may be just as well you should come at once and form an opinion about her desirability as a possible sister-in-law, before Mr. Gascoyne has irrevocably committed himself to her without obtaining your previous approbation and consent."

Faith laid down the letter on the bed before her, and burst at once into a fierce flood of tears. It was so terrible to stand so near the accomplishment of a dream of years, and yet to feel its realisation utterly unattainable!

Ever since Paul first went to Oxford it had been the dearest wish of Faith's heart to pay him a visit there. Every time he came back to that narrow world of Hillborough with tidings of all he had seen and done since he had last been home—of the sights, and the sports, and the wines, and the breakfasts, of the free young life and movement of Oxford, of the

colleges and the quads, and the walks and the gardens, and of the meadows thronged on Show Sunday, of the barges laden with folk for the boat races—the longing to join in it all, for once in her life, had grown deeper and deeper in poor Faith's bosom. It was so painful to think how near that bright little world was brought to her, and yet how distant still, how impossible, how unattainable. To Paul, her own brother, whom she loved so dearly, and from whom she had learned so much, it was all a mere matter of everyday experience; but to her, his sister, flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood, it was like the vague murmur of some remote sphere into which she could never, never penetrate.

And now the mere receipt of this easy invitation made her feel more than ever the vastness of the gulf that separated her from Oxford. Though Paul was in it and of it, as of right, to her it must for ever be as Paradise to the Peri.

So she burst into tears of pure unhappiness. She couldn't accept. Of course she couldn't accept. For her to go to Oxford was simply impossible. It was all very well for Mrs. Douglas to say, in her glib fashion, "I'll stand no excuses." That's always the way with these grand folks. They get into the habit of thinking everybody else can manage things as easily and simply as they can. But how on earth could Faith leave the infants in the middle of a term? To say nothing at all about all the other manifold difficulties that stood like lions in the way—how could she get her place filled up by proxy? how could she afford to pay her fare to Oxford and back, after having already allowed herself a trip this year down to Dorsetshire for Christmas? and, above all, how could she provide herself with those needful frocks for day and night which she must needs wear at so grand a place as Mrs. Douglas's, if she didn't wish utterly to disgrace Paul in the eyes of the entire University of Oxford?

All these manifold possibilities rose up at once before poor Faith's eyes as she read that exasperating, tantalising letter, and filled them with tears from some interminable reservoir.

And yet how tempting the invitation itself was. And, barring that constant factor of the insensibility of 'grand people' to their neighbour's limitations, how kindly and nicely Mrs. Douglas had written to her.

Faith would have given a great deal (if she'd got it) to be able to accept that cordial offer and see Oxford. But, then, she hadn't got it, and that was just the difficulty. There was the rub, as Hamlet puts it. The golden apple was dangled almost within her eager reach, yet not even on tiptoe could she hope to attain to it.

When her father came to see the letter at breakfast-time, however, to Faith's great and unspeakable surprise, he turned it over, and, looking across to Mrs. Gascoyne, said, thoughtfully:

"Well, missus?"

There was an interrogation in his tone which drove Faith half frantic.

"Well, Emery?" his wife answered, with the same intonation.

"Couldn't us manage this any'ow, mother?" the British baronet continued, looking hard at the monogram.

"No, we couldn't, Emery, I'm afraid," Mrs. Gascoyne made answer.

And that was all Faith heard about it then. Her heart sank once more like lead to the recesses of her bosom.

But as soon as she was gone to endure the infants once more, as best she might, the baronet paused as he pulled on his boots, in preparation for meeting the 8.40 down, and observed mysteriously to his better half, in a confidential undertone, with a nod towards the door whence Faith had just issued:

"You don't think we could do it, then, mother, don't you?"

Mrs. Gascoyne hesitated.

"It'd cost a power o' money, Emery," she answered dubiously.

The baronet gazed at the fire with an abstracted air.

"We've made very great sacrifices for our Paul, missus," he said with emphasis, after a short pause, during which he seemed to be screwing himself up for action; "we've made very great sacrifices for our Paul, haven't us?"

"Yes, Emery," his wife answered, with a wistful look; "I don't deny we've made very great sacrifices." And then she relapsed for a moment into thoughtful silence.

"Tain't as if we was bound to pay every penny we get to Solomons," the husband and father went on again. "Now Paul's of age, 'e's took over a part of the responsibility, mother."

"That's so, Emery," Mrs. Gascoyne assented.

"The way I look at it is this," the baronet went on, glancing up argumentatively, and beating time with his pipe to the expression of his opinion, like one who expects to encounter more opposition. "We've made very great sacrifices for Paul, we 'ave, an' wy shouldn't us expeck to make some sort o' sacrifices for Faith as well? That's 'ow I puts it."

"There's reason in that, no doubt," Mrs. Gascoyne admitted very timorously.

"Now, there's that bill o' the Colonel's," her husband continued in a most pugnacious tone, taking down his ledger. "Seventeen pound fourteen and tuppence—bin owin' ever since last Christmas twelvemonth. If only the Colonel could be got to pay up like a man—and I'll arst him myself this very day: Faith won't go becos he always swears at 'er—there ain't no reason as I can see wy Faith mightn't be let go up to Oxford."

"'Ow about the infants?" Mrs. Gascoyne interposed.

"Infants be blowed! Drat them infants!" her husband answered energetically.

"It's all very well drattin' 'em, as far as that'll go," Mrs. Gascoyne answered with feminine common-sense; "but they won't be dratted without a substitoot. She's got to find somebody as'll take 'er place with 'em."

"I'll find somebody!" the baronet answered with valorous resolve. "Dang it all, missus! if nobody else can't be got to teach 'em, wy, I'll give up drivin' and take 'em myself, sooner 'n she shouldn't go, you see if I don't."

"She've set her heart on goin'," Mrs. Gascoyne said once more, with a maternal sigh. "For dear! she's a-longin' for it. I wouldn't say nothin' to 'er face about it, for fear of makin' 'er too bashful like before you; but you seen yourself, Emery, her eyes was that red and tired with cryin'."

"They was," the baronet answered. "I seen 'em myself. An' what I say is this—we've made sacrifices for Paul, very great sacrifices, and we're pleased and proud of 'im; so wy shouldn't we make sacrifices for Faith as well, as 'asn't so many chances in life as 'im of ever enjoyin' of 'erself?"

"Wy not, sure?" Mrs. Gascoyne responded.

"Jest you look at the letter, too," the baronet went on, admiring the monogram and the address in the corner. "Anybody could see she was a real tip-topper in a minute by that. 'The Red House, Norham Road, Oxford.' An' a crest over her name, same as Lady 'Ilborough's!"

The crest afforded both the liveliest satisfaction.

So, after much confabulation, it was finally resolved that the baronet himself should beard the redoubtable Colonel in his den that very day, and that if the siege operations in that direction turned out a success, Faith should be permitted to go to Oxford. But meanwhile, for fear of failure, it was duly agreed between the two dark conspirators that nothing more should be said to Faith on the subject.

That selfsame evening, while Faith, with a very white face and a trembling hand, biting her lips hard all the while to keep back the tears, was slowly composing a suitable refusal to Mrs. Douglas, Sir Emery entered, much agitated, into the bare living-room, his hat on his head and his brow steaming, and flung down a cheque on the centre table.

"There, mother," he cried, half laughing, half crying himself in his joy, "I said I'd do it, an' I've done it, by George! He've paid up the lot—the whole bloomin' lot—seventeen pound fourteen and tuppence."

Faith glanced up from her letter aghast.

"Who?" she cried, seizing the cheque in astonishment. "Oh, father, not the Colonel?"

Her father gave way to a hysterical burst of prolonged laughter.

"Well, I thought 'e'd 'a kicked me down-stairs at first," he said, chuckling, "but I

made un pay me. I says, 'Such credit, sir,' says I, 'is clearly onreasonable. I don't want to 'urry any gentleman, sir,' says I, quite respectfull like, my 'at in my 'and, 'but if you could any'ow make it convenient.' An' bless me, missus, if 'e didn't whip out his cheque-book on the spot, an' after sayin' in a 'uff I was a impudent, presocomin' feller to venture to dun un, 'e drewed out a cheque for the lot, an' there it is afore you. An' now, Faith, my girl, you can go to Oxford!"

Faith jumped up with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, I couldn't, father!" she cried. "Not that way. I couldn't. It'd seem like robbing mother and you—and Mr. Solomons."

But youth is weak and time is fleeting. It was her last chance to go to Oxford. After little persuasion and special pleading on her mother's part, Faith was brought at last to see matters in a different light, and to acquiesce in her father's reiterated view, "What I says is this—we've made sacrifices for Paul, and why sho. dn't us make sacrifices for Faith as well, missus?"

So the end of it all was that before she went to bed that night Faith had indited a second letter to Mrs. Douglas (of which she made beforehand at least a dozen rough draughts of varying excellence), and that in that letter she accepted without reserve Mrs. Douglas's kind invitation to Oxford. But so profound was her agitation at this delightful prospect that she could hardly hold her pen to write the words; and after she had finished her first fair copy of the amended letter, she threw her head back and laughed violently.

"What's the matter, dear heart?" her mother asked, leaning over her.

And Faith, still laughing in hysterical little bursts, made answer back:

"Why, I'll have to write it out every bit all over again. I'm in such a state of mind that what do you think I've done? I was just going to end it, to Mrs. Douglas, 'Thanking you for past favours, and hoping for a continuance of the same, I remain, your obedient servant to command, Emery Gaseocyn'!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN GOOD SOCIETY.

THE next week was for Faith a crowded week of infinite preparations. There was the question of a substitute first to be settled, and the price of the substitute's honorarium to be fixed (as the head-mistress magniloquently phrased it), and then there were three dresses to be made forthwith, two for morning and one for evening—a greater number than Faith had ever before dreamed of ordering in her life all at one fell swoop, for her own personal adornment. Little Miss Perkins, the dressmaker at Number Five, two pair back, in the Court, was in and out of the Gaseocynes' all day long, especially at lunch-time, measuring and fitting,

and receiving instructions; for Faith wouldn't trust herself to make with her own hands those precious dresses, the neatest and prettiest she had ever possessed. But sympathetic little Miss Perkins made them as cheaply as she could possibly afford, being a friend of the family; and the stuffs, though new and graceful, were simple and inexpensive; so that when the bill itself at last came in, even Faith wasn't overshocked at the joint price of the three, and felt easier in her conscience about her hat and flowers. On the Tuesday night when she tried them all on, before an admiring committee of the whole house, they were unanimously voted to be without exception perfect successes; and a British baronet who chanced to stand by, his hat in his hand, remarked approvingly, in a fervour of paternal admiration, that he'd driven "more 'n one young lady to a ball in his time, an' at great houses too, who didn't look one 'arf as much the lady as our Faith, God bless 'er! in that pretty evenin' dress of 'ers. Why, she looked so fine he was 'arf afraid it was takin' a liberty to think o' kissin' 'er."

Next afternoon, in a flutter of excitement, Faith took the train to London and thence to Oxford, travelling in her old Sunday gown and hat, so as not to spoil her new Oxford dresses.

On the way, one thought alone poisoned Faith's enjoyment, and that was her fixed expectation and belief that Nea Blair would be "awfully nasty" to her. Nea was one of those "grand girls," she knew. Her father was a rector down in Cornwall or somewhere—rich, no doubt, for he'd sent his daughter abroad for the winter with a lady-companion; but, at any rate, a benefited clergyman of the Church of England, and, therefore, as Faith read the world she lived in, almost to a certainty proud and haughty. Nea would have no end of fine new dresses, of course, which would throw poor Faith's three cheap gowns entirely into the shade; and as Mrs. Douglas would, no doubt, have told her that her fellow-guest was a National Schoolmistress, she would foolishly try to suggest between them, as far as possible, that "dim spectre of the salt" that Faith had read about in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," and whose meaning Paul had succinctly explained to her.

From London to Oxford, Faith travelled second class, permitting herself that hitherto unknown extravagance partly from a vague sense that the occasion demanded it, but partly also lest Nea should happen to be in the same train, and, travelling first herself, should set down Faith as an outer barbarian if she saw her descend from a Parliamentary carriage. At Oxford Station Mrs. Douglas met her—Archie was engaged that afternoon on one of those horrid boards, she said, delegates of lodging-houses, or something equally dull and uninteresting—so she'd come down instead in her proper person to hunt up their luggage. What a pity they two hadn't travelled together!

"Is Miss Blair in the same train, then?" Faith asked, as she descended.

"Oh yes," Mrs. Douglas answered. "I see her, just back there. Come along, Faith. Nea, this is Mr. Gascoyne's sister. Now, my dears, what have you done with your luggage?"

"Mine's in the van there," Faith said, pointing vaguely forward.

"And mine's partly under the seat," Nea said, directing a porter at the same time to get out a small portmanteau from—wonder of wonders!—a third-class carriage.

Three hot, disagreeable feelings or ideas rose at once in Faith's mind. The first was that Nea Blair had travelled third on purpose, because she thought she might meet her. The second was that she herself had wasted the difference in the fares all for nothing. And the third was that she hoped Mrs. Douglas wouldn't betray to Nea the fact that the National Schoolmistress had come down second. It was just like these nasty grand girls' condescension to travel third on purpose to put one out of countenance.

Mrs. Douglas, however, didn't play her false, and the three went off to fetch Nea's other box, which was so big that Faith fairly trembled to think how many evening dresses might not be in it. They drove up together to the creeper-clad villa, and Faith, for the very first time in her life, found herself actually in good Society.

She went up to her room very nervous indeed, and began to get ready for dinner hastily. She put on her one evening frock with many doubts as to what Nea would wear, and went down at last, a few minutes before the bell rang, into the drawing-room.

Nea was there before her, in a dress still simpler and more unstudied than her own; and as Faith entered she drew her over instinctively somehow to the sofa with a friendly gesture.

"Oh, what a sweet gown!" she cried, in unaffected admiration, as Faith seated herself by her side; and, indeed, Faith did look very beautiful, with her lustrous black hair knotted neatly in a roll at the back of her head, and her dark eyes and olive complexion thrown up by the delicate colour of her dainty foulard.

"You'll be tired enough of it before you go, I expect," Faith answered, defiantly, "for it's the only evening frock I've got, and I shall have to wear it every night while I stop here." Her very pride compelled her to fling her poverty unprovoked thus point-blank at the unoffending faces of others.

"Oh, of course. One doesn't bring a whole stock of dresses with one for a short visit like this," Nea answered, smiling; "and this one's so pretty, one could never get tired of it. I think that's the best of simple gowns—they always look well if you wear them for ever; and nobody ever notices they've seen them before, because they're so unobtrusive.

Whereas, if one has a showy, striking dress, and wears it often, it attracts attention, and then everybody says, 'Oh! that's the same old thing she wore last season, don't you know, at the So-and-so's!'"

"That's just what I thought," Faith answered, trying to look unconcerned, "when I ordered this one."

"And I always say," Nea went on, glancing down at her own little quiet cashmere, "if one's poor, one should buy the simplest possible things, which never look out of place, and never go out of fashion."

She said it in the sense good Society always says such things in—the purely relative sense which regards the country parson's endowment as polite poverty; and she was thinking really of her own wardrobe, not of Faith Gascoyne's. But Faith, like all the rest of us, chose to accept the remark from her own standpoint, according to which Nea Blair was a "nasty grand girl," a representative of wealth, rank, class, and fashion.

"If one's poor," she answered, flaring up internally, "one must buy what one can afford; but that's no reason why one should be dictated to in that, or in anything else, by others."

For in the phrase "one should buy the simplest possible things," Faith thought she detected the hateful didactic leaven of the district-visitor.

By a rare flash of intuition—due, perhaps, to her profoundly sympathetic and affectionate nature—Nea divined with an instinctive insight the nature of the error into which Faith had fallen, and hastened to remove it as delicately as possible. "Oh, I don't mean that I do it to please other people," she answered, with her winning smile; "I do it to please myself. Papa never dreams for a minute of dictating to me about dress. I get my allowance four times a year, and I spend it as seems best to me."

Faith coloured up with regret for her foolish mistake, which she couldn't fail now to recognise. "But you're not poor," she said, with a marked emphasis.

"We're certainly not rich," Nea replied, looking down so as not to meet those half-angry eyes. "Of course, these things are all comparative. But I have to be very careful of my expenses."

"Well, but you went abroad for the whole winter with a companion," Faith objected, sternly.

"Oh, that was a very special thing, because I'd been ill. Papa did that, not because he was rich, but because he was so anxious to make me well again."

"I see," Faith answered, and wished to herself people wouldn't use words in such unnatural senses. Talk about being poor, indeed, when you're a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and can send your daughter to a good hotel on the Riviera, with

a hired companion to be her guardian and chaperon!

Presently the Douglasses themselves came down, and the four went in to dinner together. "We haven't asked anybody to meet you, this first evening, Nea," Mrs. Douglas said, "because we thought you'd be tired after your long journey; but your brother's coming in for a chat after dinner, Faith; as he and Nea are old friends, you know, we thought he wouldn't matter. And he's going to bring young Thistleton of Christ Church with him."

Faith almost shook in her chair at the terrible prospect. However would she get on, she wondered, with all these fine people thrust at once upon her? Good Society began positively to appal her.

Dinner, however, passed off very well. With Mrs. Douglas herself Faith felt quite at home now; and the Professor, though prodigiously learned, was a very pleasant man, Faith thought, with lots of fun in him. Nea didn't always understand what he said, apparently; and it struck Faith with some little surprise that Nea seemed on the whole to know less about the subjects Mr. Douglas discussed than she herself did. And yet Nea had had the very best education! Strange, then, that she thought the Prometheus was written by Sophocles, when Faith, who had read it through in Paul's Bohn, couldn't imagine how anyone could mistake the Æschylean touch in it. And then she had never even heard of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound!" Faith began to consider her quite a little ignoramus.

The fact was, Faith's whole days had been spent at home (or with the infants) and among Paul's books, and her one native longing and desire in life was for more culture. Hence, like many self-educated people, she had a wide though not a deep knowledge of books and things, exactly suited to make a brilliant show in general society; while Nea, whose tastes were by no means learned, had only acquired the ordinary English schoolgirl's stock of knowledge, and was far behind Faith in everything that pertains to general education.

The Professor, for his part, being an easy-going man, soon found out that Faith and he had most in common, and addressed his conversation mainly to her throughout the dinner. This flattered Faith and gave her confidence. She began to suspect that, after all, she might be able to hold her own fairly in Oxford, if one of the very heads of that learned society thought her not wholly unworthy of wasting his time upon. Appreciation brought out her best points, as opposition did her worst; and before the end of the dinner she was positively brilliant.

Once, too, in the course of it, she discovered to her surprise another little point of superiority to Nea. The Cornish girl had been talking of her experiences at Mentene, and had been particularly kind in her remarks about Paul, which made Faith's face flush once more, but

this time with pleasure. There was nothing she loved like having Paul appreciated.

"You weren't at the same hotel, though," she said after a while. "I suppose yours was a much bigger and a more expensive one?"

"Oh, dear no!" Nea answered simply; "your brother and Mr. Thistleton were at the swell place; but Madame Ceriolo took me to quite a foreign house, that she liked much better, partly because it was cheap, and partly because her tastes are awfully cosmopolitan. I never was in such polyglot society in my life before. We had Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, Germans, Swedes and Russians at *table d'hôte* beside us."

"Dear me," Faith exclaimed, "how awkward that must have been! You must have felt every time you opened your mouth that the eyes of Europe were upon you."

"I did," Nea answered, with an amused smile. "But as they didn't understand me, it didn't much matter."

"The conversation was all in French, of course," Faith went on innocently.

"With the foreigners, oh yes! But I don't speak French myself at all fluently—not anything like as well as Mr. Gascoyne, for example. He speaks just beautifully."

"Oh, I don't consider Paul's a very good accent," Faith answered with easy confidence. "We learnt together when we were quite little things, he and I, and I know he could never pronounce his *r*'s with the right amount of rolling, or distinguish between words like 'tremper' and 'tromper.' This is how Paul speaks," and she repeated a few lines of one of Victor Hugo's odes that they had read together, in perfect mimicry of the few English faults in her brother's pronunciation. They were merely the minor tricks of intonation which must almost inevitably persist in any foreigner's mouth, however profound his acquaintance with the language; but Faith's quick feminine ear detected them at once, compared with Mademoiselle Clarice's Parisian flow, and her ready tongue imitated them absolutely to perfection.

Nea listened, lost in amazement. "I shouldn't know that wasn't the purest Paris accent," she answered, half jealous on Paul's account. "I thought myself Mr. Gascoyne spoke admirably."

"Oh no; this is how it ought to be," Faith answered, now quite at home. And she delivered the lines in excellent French as Mademoiselle Clarice herself might have said them, only with infinitely more appreciation of their literary vigour.

Nea was astonished. "You speak splendidly," she said. "I'd give anything myself to be able to speak that way."

"Oh, I've spoken it ever since I was two years old," Faith answered offhand—for, to her, it seemed the most common-place accomplishment on earth to be able to talk like

the French lady's-maid. But to Nea it was proof of a consummate education.

After dinner they rose and went into the drawing-room, Faith feeling rather awkward once more, now, as to how to proceed, and keeping her eyes firmly fixed on everything Nea did for guidance.

Presently Paul and his friend came in. Faith walked towards the door with what self-possession she could, most conscious of her gait as she crossed the room and kissed her brother. Then she turned and was introduced to the blonde young man. Why, what a curious thing Paul should never have told her! The blonde young man was extremely handsome.

Paul had always described Thistleton as a very good fellow and all that sort of thing, but had never enlarged in the least upon his personal appearance; and Faith had somehow imbibed the idea that the blonde young man was stumpy and unpleasant. Perhaps it was because she had heard he was rich, and had therefore vaguely mixed him up in her own mind with the Gorgius Midas, junior, of Mr. Du Maurier's sketches in *Punch*. But certainly, when she saw a fine, well-built young fellow of six feet one, with intelligent eyes and a pleasing, ingenuous, frank countenance, she failed to recognise in him altogether the Thistleton of whom her brother had told her. The blonde young man took her fancy at once, so much so that she felt shy at the idea of talking to him.

For to Faith it was a very great ordeal indeed, this sudden introduction to a Society into which, till this moment, she had never penetrated. The very size and roominess of the apartments—though the Douglasses' house was by no means a large one—the brilliancy of the gas, the lightness of the costume, the flowers and decorations, the fluffiness and airiness, and bright colour of everything, fairly took her breath away. She felt herself moving in a new world of gauze and glitter. And then to be seated in these novel surroundings, to undertake conversation of an unrehearsed kind with unknown strangers, it was almost more than Faith's equanimity was proof against. But she bore up bravely, nevertheless, for very shame, and answered at first almost as in a dream, all that the blonde young man said to her.

Thistleton, however, had no such difficulties, for he was born rich; and he talked away so easily and pleasantly to the National Schoolmistress about things she really took an interest in and understood, that at the end of an hour she was hardly afraid of him, especially as he seemed so fond of Paul, and so proud and pleased about his Marlborough Essay.

"I wanted to bet him ten to one in fivers he'd get it," Thistleton remarked, all radiant; "but he wouldn't bet. He knew he was sure of it, and he wasn't going to hedge. And all the House was awfully glad of it. Why, the

Dean himself called him up and congratulated him!"

As for Paul, he talked most of the time to Nea, with occasional judicious interventions on Mrs. Douglas's part, who was never so pleased as when she could make young people happy.

When they took their departure that evening Faith said to her hostess, "What a very nice young man that Mr. Thistleton is!" As a matter of fact, it was the very first opportunity she had ever had of talking to any young man of decent education and gentlemanly manners on equal terms, except her own brother, and she was naturally pleased with him.

Mrs. Douglas shrugged her shoulders a little bit—almost as naturally as Madams Ceriolo.

"Do you think so?" she said. "Well, he's nice enough, I suppose; but his manners haven't that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, somehow. He's a trifle too boisterous for my taste, you know. Good-bearded, of course, and all that sort of thing, but not with the stamp of Blue Blood about him."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear Eleanor," the Professor ejaculated with a good round mouth. "The young fellow's as well behaved as most earls in England, and, if it comes to that, a great deal better."

"I'm so glad you say so, Mr. Douglas," Faith put in with a smile—"that it's nonsense, I mean—for I should have been afraid to."

"Well, but really, Faith," Mrs. Douglas retorted, "he isn't fit to hold a candle any day to your brother Paul."

"I should think not, indeed!" Nea exclaimed immediately, with profound conviction. "Why, Mr. Gascoyne's just worth a thousand of him!"

Faith turned with a grateful look to Nea for that kindly sentence; and yet she would have liked the praise of Paul all the better if it hadn't been contrasted with dispraise of Mr. Thistleton. For her part, she thought him a most delightful young man, and was only sorry he was so dreadfully rich, and therefore, of course, if one got to know him better, no doubt nasty.

They parted in the passage outside Faith's bedroom, and Nea, as she said "Good-night, dear," to her new friend, leant forward to kiss her. Faith hesitated for a moment: she wasn't accustomed to cheapen her embraces in the usual feline feminine manner, and as yet she didn't feel sure of Nea; but next instant she yielded, and pressed her companion's hand. "Thank you so much," she said, with tears in her eyes, and darted into her room. But Nea didn't even so much as know for what she thanked her.

Faith meant for not having been "grand," and crushed her. To herself she was always the National Schoolmistress.

But Nea saw in her only a graceful, hand-

some, well-read girl, and Paul Gascoyne's sister.

So ended Faith Gascoyne's first equally dreaded and longed-for evening in Good Society.

Outside the Douglasses' door Thistleton paused and looked at his friend.

"Why, Gascoyne," he said, "you never told me what a beautiful girl your sister was, and so awfully clever!"

Paul smiled. "As a rule," he said, "men don't blow the trumpet for their own female relations."

Thistleton accepted the explanation in silence, and walked along mute for two or three minutes. Then he began again, almost as if to himself: "But this one," he said, "is so exceptionally beautiful."

Paul was aware of an uncomfortable sensation at the base of his throat, and diverted the conversation to the chances of a bump on the first night of the races.

CHAPTER XIX.

IDYLS OF YOUTH.

To Faith those ten delicious days at Oxford were a dream fulfilled—pure gold, every one of them. How glorious were those strolls round Magdalen cloisters; those fresh morning walks in Christ Church meadows; those afternoon lounges in the cool nooks of Wadham Gardens! How grand the tower of Merton loomed up in the moonlight; how noble was the prospect of the crowded High, with the steeple of St. Mary's and St. Laud's porch in the middle distance, viewed from the stone steps of Queen's or University! How she loved each mouldering pinnacle of Oriel, each vaulted boss in the great roof of Christ Church! What delightful afternoon teas in Tom Quad; what luxurious breakfasts in the New Buildings at Balliol! To the National Schoolmistress, fresh from the din of the infants and the narrow precincts of Plowden's Court, the height and breadth and calm and glory of those majestic colleges were something unknown, unpictured, unfancied. Even after all Paul had told her, it eclipsed and effaced her best ideal. She had only one pang—that she must so soon leave it all.

And what a grand phantasmagoria it produced in her mind, that whirling week of unparalleled excitement! In the morning, to view the Bodleian or the Radcliffe, to walk under the chestnuts on the Cherwell bank, or to admire from the bridge the soaring tower of Magdalen. At mid-day, to lunch in some undergraduate's quarters, or with bearded dons in some panelled common-room: for Mrs. Douglas was known to be the best of hostesses, and whoever saw Oxford under her auspices was sure not to lack for entertainment or for entertainments. In the afternoon, to float down the river to Ifley in a tub pair; or

to lounge on padded punts under the broad shade of Addison's Walk; or to drink tea in rooms looking out over the Renaissance court of St. John's; or to hear the anthem trilled from sweet boyish throats in New College Chapel. In the evening, to dine, at home or abroad, in varied company; to listen to some concert in the hall of Exeter: or to see the solemn inner quad of Jesus incongruously decked out with Japanese lanterns and hanging lights for a Cymric festival. A new world seemed to open out all at once before her. A world all excitement, pleasure, and loveliness.

To most girls brought up in quiet, cultivated homes, a visit to Oxford is one long whirl of dissipation. To Faith, brought up in the cabman's cottage, it was a perfect revelation of art, life and beauty. It sank into her soul like first love. If you can imagine a bird's-eye view of Florence, Paris, and educated Society rolled into one, that is something like what those ten days at Oxford were to Faith Gascoyne.

Every night Nea Blair went out with her, and every night, to Faith's immense surprise, Nea wore the same simple cashmere dress she had worn at Mrs. Douglas's that first evening. It made Faith feel a great deal more at home with her; after three days, indeed, she quite got over her fear of Nea. Nea was so gentle, so sweet, so kind, it was impossible for anybody long to resist her. By the third evening they were sworn friends, and when Faith went up with her after the little carpet-dance to bed, it was actually with her arm round the "grand girl's" waist that she mounted the staircase.

On the morning of their fourth day at Oxford they were walking in the High with Mrs. Douglas—on their way to visit the reeredos at All Souls—when just outside the doors of the "Mitre" Nea was suddenly stopped by a golden-haired apparition.

"Oh my, mamma!" the apparition exclaimed, in a fine Pennsylvanian twang, "if here ain't Nea Blair as large as life and twice as nat'ral! Well, now, I do call that jest lovely! To think we should meet you here again, Nea. But I felt like it, somehow; I said to mamma this morning, as we were unloading the baggage down at the cars, 'I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Nea Blair's at Oxford.' I knew you were coming up this summer term, you know, to visit friends, and I kind of guessed we should probably synchronise."

"Nea, my dear," Mrs. Douglas remarked, with chilly dignity, "will you introduce your acquaintances?"

For Mrs. Douglas's British back was considerably stiffened by the newcomer's obvious lack of the Vere de Vere exotical temperament.

"This is Miss Boyton," Nea said, presenting her; "she was with us at Mentone. And this is Mrs. Boyton."

For where Isabel was, there her mother sank naturally into the background.

"Yes; and, my dear, we've only just arrived. We wired to Mr. Thistleton to engage rooms for us at the "Mitre." There's another hotel at Oxford, he told us—the Randolph—but it doesn't sound so mediæval and English and aristocratic as the "Mitre." And now we've come out to look around a bit and see the city."

"Oh, you're Mr. Thistleton's guests, are you?" Faith asked, with a faint undercurrent of suspicion, for she didn't half like this sudden intrusion of the golden-haired Pennsylvanian upon her special undergraduate. Though she had only been three days at Oxford, Thistleton had already been most marked in his politeness, and Faith, though innocent as a child of ulterior designs upon the rich young man, didn't want to have his immediate kind attentions diverted upon others.

"Yes, indeed," Isabel answered. "We've gotten our own rooms for ourselves at the 'Mitre,' of course, but we expect Mr. Thistleton to walk us around and give us a good time while we stop in Oxford. Momma and I are looking forward to enjoying ourselves all the time. Oh, don't the place look jest lovely!"

"It is lovely," Nea said; "I always enjoy it so much. But why did you telegraph to Mr. Thistleton, instead of Mr. Gascoyne? We saw so much more of Mr. Gascoyne at Mentone."

"Well, to tell you the truth," Isabel answered, "I didn't jest feel like asking Mr. Gascoyne; while that young Thistleton fellow—he's a real good sort, but only a boy, you know—so I didn't mind asking him."

"This is Mr. Gascoyne's sister," Nea said, with a slight wave towards Faith, who stood irresolute in the background. "She's stopping with me at Mrs. Douglas's. We're going just now to see one of the colleges—All Souls'."

"Well, I don't mind if we catch on to it," Isabel answered, briskly. "We've jest come out to see what the place is like, and one college'll do for us, I presoom, as well as another. According to the Guide, the city must be full of them."

Mrs. Douglas knocked under with condescending tact. She recollected that Nea had told her Miss Boyton was rich; and, after all, there are always lots of nice young men lying about loose who'd be glad to pick up with a rich and pretty American.

"If your mamma and you would like to join our party," she said, with her best second-class smile (Mrs. Douglas's smiles were duly graduated for all ranks of Society), "I'm sure we shall be delighted. Any friends of Nea's are always welcome to us."

So from that moment forth the Boytons were duly accepted as part and parcel of Mrs. Douglas's set during that crowded race week. They went everywhere with Faith and Nea,

and shared in most of the undergraduate feasts which Mrs. Douglas offered vicariously for her young friends' amusement.

Undergraduate Oxford loves anything fresh, and Isabel Boyton's freshness, at any rate, was wholly beyond dispute. Before the week was out, the golden-haired Pennsylvanian had become a feature in Christ Church, and even betting was offered in Peckwater whether or not Gascoyne would marry her.

The same evening Mrs. Douglas gave her first dinner-party for her two guests, and as they sat in the drawing-room, just before the earliest outsider arrived, Mrs. Douglas turned to Faith (Nea hadn't yet come down) and remarked parenthetically:

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Thistleton will take you in to dinner, my dear. He'll go after your brother Paul, and then Mr. Wade'll take in Nea."

Faith shrank back a little alarmed.

"Oh, but tell me, Mrs. Douglas," she cried, somewhat shamefaced, "why mayn't I go last? I don't want to go in before Nea."

Mrs. Douglas shook her head in most decided disapproval. "It can't be helped, my child," she said. "It's not my arrangement. I've got nothing on earth to do with settling the table of precedence. It's the Lord Chamberlain who has long ago decided once for all that your brother Paul, as a baronet's son, walks in before young Thistleton, and that you, as a baronet's daughter, walk in before Nea."

Faith gave a little gesture of extreme dissatisfaction. This playing at baronetcy was to her most distasteful.

"I can't bear it," she cried. "Do, dear Mrs. Douglas, as a special favour, let Nea at least go in before me."

But Mrs. Douglas was inflexible. "No, no," she said; "none of your nasty Radical levelling ways for me, turning Society topsyturvy with your new-fangled ideas, and all just to suit your own unbridled fancy. People of quality must behave as such. If you happen to be born a baronet's daughter you must take precedence of a country parson's girl. *Noblesse oblige*. That's the price you have to pay for being born in an exalted station in life. You must fulfil the duties that belong to your place in Society."

So, with a very bad grace, poor Faith yielded.

When Nea came down, Faith observed with surprise that she was wearing even now the same simple cashmere dress as on the first night of her visit. Faith had expected that for this special function at least Nea would have appeared arrayed, like Solomon, in all her glory. But no; the plain cashmere was still to the front, as invariable as Faith's own delicate foulard. A curious thought flashed across Faith's mind: Could the "grand girl" herself, as she still sometimes thought her, have brought but one evening dress in her box, just as she herself had done?

For, after all, Faith began to observe that, in a deeper sense than she had at first expected, we are all in the last resort built of much the same mould, and that the differences of high and low are a great deal more mere differences of accent speech, and dress than of intellect or emotion.

That evening Mr. Thistleton, she thought, was more attentive to her than ever; and when she spoke to him once about the golden-haired apparition that had flashed upon them in the High Street from the "Mitre" that morning, he only laughed good-humouredly, and remarked, with tolerant contempt, that Miss Boyton was "real racy," of American soil, and that her mamma was a most amiable and unobtrusive old Egyptian mummy.

"You saw a good deal of her at Mentone, I suppose," Faith said, looking up at him from her niche in the ottoman.

"Yes, and heard a good deal of her, too," Thistleton answered, smiling. "She wasn't born to blush unseen, that excellent Miss Boyton. Wherever she goes she makes herself felt. She's amusing, that's all; one endures her because one gets such lots of fun out of her."

"But she's very rich, Paul says," Faith murmured, abstractedly.

"Oh, they grow 'em very rich in America, I fancy," the blonde young man replied, with careless ease. "So do we in Yorkshire, too; we don't set much store by *that* up in the North, you know. People are all rolling in money with us in Sheffield. To be rich up there is positively vulgar, so far as that goes. The distinguished thing in the North is to be poor but cultured. It's almost as fashionable as being poor but honest used once to be in Sunday-school literature."

"Still, she's pretty, don't you think, in her own way?" Faith asked, pleading Miss Boyton's case out of pure perversity.

"She's pretty enough, if you go in for prettiness," the blonde young man retorted, with a glance of admiration at Faith's own raven hair and great speaking eyes. "I don't myself—I don't like women to be pretty."

"Don't like them to be pretty!" Faith repeated, aghast.

"No," the blonde young man replied, stoutly. "I prefer beauty to prettiness. I never cared much for tow-haired dolls. Eyes with a soul in them are much more to my taste. Besides," he added, breaking off suddenly, "she's not quite *our* sort, you know, Miss Gascoyne."

"*Our* sort?" Faith echoed interrogatively, taken aback at the inclusiveness of the first person plural. "I—I don't quite understand you."

"Well, *your* sort, then," the blonde young man corrected, with imperturbable good-humour, "if you won't let me reckon myself in the same day with you. I mean, she's not a person of any birth or position or refinement; she's a *parvenue*, you know, a perfect *parvenue*. I don't mean to say I go in for a Plantagenet

ancestry myself," he continued quickly, seeing Faith was trying hard to put in a word and interrupt him; "but I don't like people quite so freshly fledged as she is. I prefer them with some tincture of polite society."

Faith blushed up to the eyes with some strange sense of shame. It was so novel a position for her to find herself in, that she hardly knew how to brazen it out. "She was very well received at Mentone," she stammered out uneasily.

"At Mentone? Oh yes; in a cosmopolitan place like that one can swallow anybody—why, we even swallowed Miss Blair's chaperon—that delightful little humbug and adventuress, Madame Ceriolo, who anywhere else in the world would have been utterly impossible. But, hang it all! you know, Miss Gascoyne, you wouldn't like your own brother, now, for instance, to marry her?"

Faith looked down, and hardly knew what to say. "If ever Paul marries," she answered at last, speaking out of her whole heart, "I should like him to marry—someone more worthy of him."

As she spoke she lifted her eyes again, and met Nea Blair's, who, seated close by, had just caught by accident the last few words of their conversation. Nea let her glance fall on the carpet and coloured faintly. Then Faith felt sure, with an instinctive certainty, that Nea was not wholly indifferent to her penniless brother.

When they went upstairs that night again, they sat long talking in Nea's room, till their candles had burnt low in the sockets. They talked unrestrainedly, like two bosom friends. Faith wasn't afraid any longer of the "grand girl." She was more at home with Nea than she had ever been with anybody else, except Paul, before. As she rose at last, reluctantly, to go to bed, she held Nea's hand a long time in hers. "Nea," she said, pressing it hard, "how strange it all seems! I was so afraid to meet you only four days since—though it's like a year now, for every day's been so crammed full of pleasure—and tonight I can't bear to think I've got to go back so soon to my school once more, and my dull routine, and my petty life, and never again see anything more of you. It's been all like a beautiful, beautiful dream—meeting you here, and all the rest—and I shall feel so sad to have to go away by-and-by and leave it all."

"Perhaps we shall meet often again in the future, now we've once got to know and love each other," Nea answered, soothing her.

Faith turned with the candle in her hand to go. Great tears were in her eyes. She trembled violently.

"No, no," she said; "I sometimes think it's all a mistake ever for a moment to come out of one's native sphere. It makes the revulsion seem all the worse when you have to go back to it."

CHAPTER XX.

BREAKING THE ICE.

THE row up the river to Ensham was delightful; the sky was blue, the meadows were green, the water was clear, and the lillies that lolled like Oriental beauties on its top were snow-white and golden. Only one thing damped Faith's and Nea's happiness—it was the last day of their visit to Oxford.

They had much to regret. The gardens were so beautiful, the colleges so calm, the river so peaceful—and the two young men had been so very attentive.

Faith wondered how, after Mr. Thistleton's open and unaffected homage, she could ever endure the boorish politeness of the few young fellows she saw from time to time after rare intervals at Hillborough. Nea wondered how, after seeing so much of that nice Mr. Gascoyne at Mentone and Oxford, she could ever relapse into the hum-drum life of keeping house for her father in the Cornish rectory. Mr. Gascoyne was so clever, and so full of beautiful ideas. He seemed to be so thoroughly human all through! Nea loved to hear him talk about men and things. And she really did think, in a sort of way, that Mr. Gascoyne, perhaps, to some extent, liked her.

So when she found herself, after lunch at Mrs. Douglas's picnic, strolling away with Paul towards the field where the fritillaries grow, and the large purple orchises, she was conscious generally of a faint thrill of pleasure—that strange, indefinite, indefinable thrill which goes so much deeper than the shallow possibilities of our haphazard language.

They wandered and talked for many minutes, picking the great shequered blossoms as they moved, and never thinking whether they went, either with their feet or their tongues, as is the wont of adolescence. Nea was full of praise for Faith—such an earnest girl, so sincere and profound when you came to know her; and Paul, who, to a great extent, had been Faith's teacher, was proud that his pupil should be liked and appreciated.

"But what a pity," Nea said at last, "we should have to part to-morrow! For we've both of us got on so well together."

"It is a pity," Paul said, "a very great pity. Faith has never enjoyed anything so much in her life, I know; and your being there has made it doubly enjoyable for her."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so," Nea exclaimed, with evident delight. "You can't think how much I've enjoyed having her here too. She's a dear girl. We've had such long, long talks together in our own rooms every evening. And, do you know, Mr. Gascoyne," she added shyly, "before she came I was so afraid of meeting her."

"Why?" Paul asked, unable to understand such a feeling towards Faith on the part of a born lady like Nea.

"Oh, I don't know," Nea answered. "I

can't exactly say why. But sometimes, when you want to like somebody ever so much, don't you know, you're so afraid in return they won't like you."

"And you wanted to like Faith?" Paul asked, all tremulous.

"I wanted to like her, oh, ever so much! But I was afraid she mightn't take a fancy to me. It often happens so, of course; but I didn't want it to be so with her. And now I'm sure she likes me very much, and that's such a comfort to me."

"You're very kind," Paul answered, embarrassed.

There was a long pause, and their eyes met. Eyes can say so much more than tongues. Nea's fell again as she added slowly:

"And I hope now we shall meet very, very often."

"Who? You and Faith?" Paul cried, biting his lip hard, and holding in his words with difficulty.

"Yes," Nea said. "Some day she must come down to Cornwall and see us."

Paul looked up from the fritillaries, and felt his heart beat and heave.

"That can never, never be," he answered solemnly.

Nea turned to him all at once with an astonished look.

"Never, Mr. Gascoyne?" she cried. "Oh, don't say that! I want to meet her very often now. We're friends for life. Why shouldn't I see her?"

It was one of those moments in a man's life when, do what he will, the passion within him gets the better of him and out-masters him. He looked into Nea's deep eyes—those eyes he would never see after to-morrow again—and answered in a tone of poignant regret:

"Because you and I must keep as far apart as we can from one another."

Nea more than half guessed his meaning at once, but she would have it direct from his own very lips before she could believe it.

"And why, Mr. Gascoyne?" she asked, with a throbbing heart.

"Because," Paul said boldly, blurring out the whole truth in spite of himself, "Nea, I love you."

There was a faint short interval, during which Nea felt a sort of electric quiver pass through all her frame; and then she murmured very low:

"Thank you, Mr. Gascoyne, thank you."

"And I'm afraid," Paul went on—with insensate folly, as he thought to himself—"I'm afraid—I'm sure—you love me a little in return, Nea."

Nea raised her eyes, one flush from chin to forehead, and met his gaze bashfully.

"More than that: a great deal," she answered, with a tremor.

Paul sat down on the dry bank by the hedge, and seated Nea gently on a big stone beside him.

"And though I shall never see you again after to-morrow," he said, "I was wicked enough and foolish enough—it came over me so just now, that I couldn't avoid giving myself the satisfaction of telling you so."

"I'm glad you did," Nea murmured through the tears that struggled hard to rise and choke her utterance. "I like to know it."

"It was wrong of me, very wrong of me," Paul cried, already penitent; "but, Nea, I can't be sorry I did, when I think how sweet, how delicious, it is for me to know that through all my future life I can carry away the memory of those words you just uttered. More than that: a great deal—I shall never forget them."

"Thank you," Nea cried once more, with sweet simplicity.

Paul looked at her long, with a great yearning in his heart.

"And it's hard to think," he went on, "we must part for ever to-morrow."

"Why for ever?" Nea asked, looking back at him again with womanly trust. "Why for ever, Mr. Gascoyne? If you love me, and I love you, why need it be for ever?"

Paul tore a purple fritillary to pieces nervously.

"Oh, what have I done?" he said, looking up at her anxiously. "Why did I ever begin it? I've acted so wrong, so wickedly, so cruelly! I ought never to have spoken to you on the subject at all. I ought to have looked it up tight—tight in my own bosom."

"I should have found it out, even if you hadn't told me," Nea answered, simply. "And whether you told me or not, I, at least, would have loved you."

Paul took her little hand unreprieved in his own.

"I was mad, though," he said; "I was wicked to trouble you. Nea, I won't say anything about the difference in our positions, or anything like that, for I know you are good enough and true enough to love a man for himself, and not for his wealth or what else he can give you. I know, poor as I am, and sprung from where I spring, you'd be willing to take me. But I oughtn't to have spoken to you at all about my love. I ought to have stifled and hidden it all from you, knowing, as I do now, that we can never marry. It was cruel of me so to cross your path, so to wring that confession from your own sweet lips—only to tell you that I can never marry you."

"You didn't wring it from me," Nea whispered low. "I like to tell you so."

"Oh, Nea!" Paul cried, and pressed her hand in silence.

"Yes, I like to tell you," she repeated. "I love to tell you. I'm glad for my own sake you've made it possible for me to tell you. I liked you very, very much at Mentone; and every day I've seen you since I've liked you better, and better, and better. And then, I've talked so much about you with Faith. Every

evening she and I have done nothing but talk about you. That was why I wanted to like Faith so much, because—because I was so very fond of you. But, Paul," she said it out quite naturally, "Paul, why can't you marry me?"

Paul began in some vague, shadowy, indefinite way to tell her once more about those terrible claims that so weighed upon his conscience, but before he'd got well through the very first sentence Nea said, interrupting him:

"I know, I know. I suppose you mean about Mr. Solomons."

"Has Faith told you all about Mr. Solomons, then?" Paul exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes," Nea answered. "Of course I wanted to know as much as I could about you, because I was so much interested in you, and—and—I loved you so dearly; and Faith told me all about that, and it made me so very, very sorry for you."

"Then, if you know all that," Paul cried, "you must know also how wrong it was of me to speak to you, how impossible for me ever to marry you."

Nea looked down at the fritillaries in her hand, and began to arrange them nervously with twitching fingers. After a while she spoke.

"I don't think so," she said, in a very calm voice. "Even if we two can never, never marry, it's better I should know you love me, and you should know I love you. It's better to have found that out, even though nothing more come of it, than to go through life blindly, not knowing whether we had ever won one another. I shall go back to Cornwall, oh, ever so much happier than I came away, feeling certain at least now that you love me, Paul."

The young man leant forward. His lips pursed up of themselves. Nea didn't shrink away from him. She didn't tremble or withdraw. She allowed him to kiss her. The kiss thrilled through her inmost being.

Paul leant back once more, all penitence, against the bank.

"What have I done?" he cried, aghast at his own folly. "Let us rise and go, Nea. The longer we stay here, the worse and worse will we make matters."

"No," Nea answered, quietly. "I don't want to go. I like sitting here. I can't tell you go yet. We must understand better how we stand with each other. You mustn't go, Paul, till you've told me everything."

Paul, delighted in his secret heart at the moment's respite, began once more, and told her all his fears and doubts for the future—how he was bound hand and foot to Mr. Solomons; how he must spend his whole life in trying to repay him; and what folly it would be for him to dream of marrying. He reproached himself bitterly for having let Nea see into the secret of his heart. He ought never to have told her, he said; he ought never to have told her.

Nea listened to him to the very end. Then she fixed her earnest eyes upon him and answered softly: "Paul, I will wait for you, if I wait a lifetime."

"It isn't a case for waiting," Paul cried: "it's a case for despair!"

"Then I won't despair," Nea answered. "Not even to please you. I'll be happy enough in knowing you love me."

For a minute or two more they talked it over together in gentle whispers. Nea could never love anyone else, she said; so what did it matter whether they could marry or not? She would be his, at any rate, for she could never be anybody else's.

"And when I go, you'll write to me, Paul?" she added, pleadingly.

Paul hesitated.

"I musn't," he cried. "I oughn't to, Nea. Remember, we two are not engaged to each other."

"We're more than engaged," Nea answered, boldly, with the boldness of a true woman's heart. "We're each other's already. Paul, I'll write to you, and you must write to me. You have great powers, and you'll do good work in the world yet. In time, perhaps, you'll pay off all this weight of debt that clings like a millstone round your neck, and then you'll marry me. But, if not, we'll live for one another for ever. And I shall live happy if I know you love me."

"One more kiss, Nea!"

"As many more as ever you like, Paul."

CHAPTER XXI.

COINCIDENCES.

IN another part of the fields, meanwhile, Faith Gascoyne and Charlie Thistleton had wandered off together along a backwater of the river, in search of forget-me-nots, they said, and white water-lilies. Oh, those innocent flowers, how much they have to answer for! How many times have they not been made the excuse for such casual divagations from the straight path of Britannic chaperonage!

Thistleton had helped to row them up stream, and Faith thought she had never seen him look so handsome as he looked just then in his bright Christ Church boating-jacket, with the loose flannel shirt showing white in front where the jacket lay open. A manly man seldom looks manlier than in boating costume. In evening clothes, to be sure, as she had seen him at Exeter concert, he was perhaps as gentlemanly; but that was mere gloss and outward show; the young Greek god came out more fully in the garb of athletics. Faith thought with a sigh that to-morrow her holiday would be over for ever, and she must needs go back to the vacant young men of Hillborough.

They sat down by a flood-gate on a tiny

side-stream, and arranged their forget-me-nots into a respectable bundle. The flood-gate had a sluice-door in it, and the water pouring through made murmuring music. The sky was just chequered with fleecy clouds, and the wind whispered through the willows on the margin. It was all a sweet idyl to Faith's full young heart; and Mr. Thistleton by her side was so kind and attentive.

She knew Mr. Thistleton admired her—in a way. She couldn't help seeing, as she sat there in her prettiest morning frock, that he cast eyes of delight every now and again at her rich brown complexion and her uncommon features. For Faith Gascoyne was above everything uncommon-looking; a certain individual stamp of distinction, half high-bred, half gipsy-like, was the greatest charm of her peculiarly cut features. And Thistleton gazed at her with almost rude admiration—at least, Faith would almost have thought it rude if it hadn't been so evidently sincere and simple-minded.

Nevertheless, when Thistleton, turning round abruptly, asked her point-blank that alarming question, "Miss Gascoyne, do you think you could ever like me?" Faith was so completely taken by surprise that she started back suddenly, and let the forget-me-nots tumble from her hands on to the beam of the flood-gate.

"Why, of course, Mr. Thistleton," she answered, with a faint smile, "I like you—oh, ever so much! You're so kind and good-natured."

"But that's not what I mean," the blonde young man corrected hastily. "I mean—well, Faith, I mean, do you think you could ever love me?"

If ever a man took a woman by storm in this world it was surely this one!

There was a long pause, during which Faith picked up the forget-me-not one by one, and arranged them together with deliberate care into a neat little bouquet. But her heart was throbbing fast all the while, for all that.

At last, she looked down and whispered low, while the blonde young man waited eagerly for her answer:

"Mr. Thistleton, you ought never to have asked me that question at all. Consider—consider the difference in our positions."

Thistleton looked down, a little bit crestfallen.

"Well, I know it's presumptuous of me," he said with a shy air, just emboldened by his eagerness. "A Sheffield cutler's son has no right to ask a— a lady of birth and rank to be his wife off-hand; but I thought, Miss Gascoyne—"

Faith cut him short with an impatient gesture. Was this *mauvaise comédie* of her father's baronetcy to pursue her like an evil fate through life, even in these its supremest moments?

"I didn't mean *that*," she said, leaning eagerly forward, and looking up at him with a little appealing glance for mercy. "Surely, Mr. Thistleton, you must have known yourself I didn't mean *that*. But you are so much richer and better brought up than me, and you move in such a very different society. I—I should be ashamed myself of publicly disgracing you."

Thistleton glanced across at her with a curiously doubtful, half-incredulous air.

"Why, how much at cross-purposes we all live!" he said, with a little awkward laugh. "I've been wanting all day to speak out my mind to you, and I've been afraid all along, for I thought you'd think me so very presuming. And I'd made up all kinds of pretty things to say to you, don't you know, about trying to live up to your level, and all that sort of thing—because you're so clever, and so brilliant, and so much above me in every way; and now as soon as ever I open my mouth, you knock me down with a regular stunning back-hander like that, and I don't know where on earth to begin or go on again. I can't remember what I meant to say to you. I thought if, after I took my degree, and went to the Bar in London—my father wants me to go to the Bar, just as a nominal thing, you see, because it's so very respectable; but, of course, he'll make me a handsome allowance for all expenses—I thought, if I lived in town, and kept up a good establishment, and made a home fit for you, you might perhaps, when you got to know me a little better, think me not quite altogether beneath you. And, to tell you the truth, Miss Gascoyne, to make security doubly sure, I wrote to my father day before yesterday, telling him everything about your brother and yourself, and saying that I thought of venturing to ask you to marry me, and I got this telegram in reply from my people last night—you can see it if you like, it's rather long of it's sort: my father's always just a trifle extravagant in the matter of telegraphing."

Faith bit her lip as she took the telegram from the blonde young man; the whole thing, in spite of her agitation, was so supremely ridiculous! "Your mother and I have read your letter with satisfaction and pleasure," the telegram said, "and are delighted to see you think of looking so high in that matter. We are gratified at the choice you have made of companions, and now in another more important relation. It would be a very proud thing for us if at the close of our career, which has been long and prosperous, we could see our dear boy the brother-in-law of a man of title. You may be sure we would do everything to make you both happy. Don't delay on any account to ask the young lady as soon as possible, if a fitting occasion for doing so should arise. And if she accepts you, take any credit necessary to make her a suitable present of whatever object you think desirable.

Let us know the lady's answer at once by telegram."

Faith handed it back to him with a burning face. Her hands trembled. "It's all so strange to me," she murmured, bewildered.

"At any rate," Thistleton cried, "your objection's answered beforehand, you see. So far as any difference in position goes, both my parents and I looked at that question exactly opposite from the way you look at it."

"I see," Faith answered, looking down, all fiery red, and with her soul one troubled whirlwind within her.

"Then what do you answer me?" Thistleton asked, taking her hand in his. "Faith—may I call you Faith?—you struck me so dumb by taking such a topsy-turvy view of our relations, that I hadn't got words to tell you what I wanted. But I love you, Faith, and I want you to marry me."

Faith let her hand lie unresistingly in his, but turned away her face, still hot and fiery. "You—you are very kind, Mr. Thistleton," she answered.

"But that's not what I want," Thistleton put in, leaning forward once more. "Faith, I want you to tell me you're ready to marry me."

"No," Faith answered resolutely. "I can't. Never, never, never!"

"Why?" Thistleton asked, dropping her hand all at once. She let it hang idle at her side as if sorry he had dropped it."

"Because—I mustn't," Faith answered, all aglow.

"Don't you like me?" Thistleton asked with a very wistful look. "Oh, Faith, I've been watching you ever since you came to Oxford, and I really began to think you did like me, just a little."

"I like you very much," Faith answered, trembling. "I never was—so flattered—at anything in my life as that—that you should think me worthy to marry you."

"Oh, don't say that!" the young man cried in a voice of genuine distress. "It hurts me to hear you talk like that. It's so upside down, somehow. Why, Faith, I lay awake trembling all last night, wondering how I could ever venture to ask you—you who are so beautiful, and good, and clever. I was afraid to speak to you. Only my love could have emboldened me to speak. And when I *did* ask you at last, I blurted it out point-blank like a schoolboy, because I felt you so much above me that I hardly dared to mention such a thing in your presence."

Faith smiled a troubled smile. "You're very good," she said. "I like you ever so much, Mr. Thistleton. I should like to sit here with you—always."

"Then why won't you marry me?" Thistleton cried eagerly.

Faith pulled about the forget-me-nots ostentatiously once more. "I hardly know myself yet," she answered. "It's all so new. It's

come as such a surprise to me. I haven't had time to collect my thoughts. I only know in a dim sort of way that it's quite, quite impossible."

"Don't you think you could love me?" Thistleton asked very low.

Faith looked at him as he sat there in his manly boating suit—so much more of a man than anybody she had ever before dreamt of—and then she thought of the infants. "I could—like you a good deal, I'm sure," she answered slowly. "It isn't that, Mr. Thistleton. It isn't that at all. If—if I yielded to my own heart," she spoke very low, "perhaps I might say to you *Yes* at once—"

Before she could finish her sentence she felt an arm placed boldly round her shapely waist, and two eager lips pressed hard against hers. She rather fancied Mr. Thistleton was kissing her. "If you say as much as that," the blonde young man cried out triumphantly, "you have said all. I don't mind any more now. Faith, Faith, you belong to me!"

Faith struggled to be free so hard that Thistleton let her go and sat looking at her admiringly.

"Mr. Thistleton," she said, with quiet dignity, "you must never do that again. I like you very much, but I told you just now I can never marry you."

"And I asked you why," Thistleton retorted with the audacity begotten of love; "and you'd no good reason to give me; so I say, on the contrary, you'll have to marry me."

Faith drew a long breath and pulled herself together. The reasons why it was impossible came clearer to her now. They dawned slowly on her mind. She leaned back and explained them one by one to Thistleton—her father's calling; the family poverty; her mother's need for somebody to help her; his own future in life; the impossibility of keeping in two societies at once anywhere.

But Thistleton, with the unconscionable ardour of youth, would listen to none of these lame excuses. As for her father, he said, he was a British baronet, and what better father-in-law any member of a North-Country business house could possibly want he was at a loss to discover. As to the family poverty, that was all the more reason why the family should restore itself to its proper position by marrying into other families that had more money than brains, and more land than ancestry. When Paul came into his title—which he hoped wouldn't be for many years yet—they'd be none the prouder than they were of him now, with his cleverness, and his industry, and his fine, high character.

"But still, you know," he said, coming back to the only undeniable truth of logic, "a baronet's a baronet."

As Faith seemed disinclined to dispute that self-evident specimen of an identical proposition, Thistleton went on to remark that Faith, if married, could do a great deal more to help

her mother than in school with the infants; that his own future would be all the more assured in Society's eyes if he allied himself to a member of a titled family; and that, as his father wanted him to go into Parliament finally, he wished to have a wife who would be a credit and an aid to him in that arduous position. Finally, when Faith urged the difficulty of mixing in two societies at once, Thistleton looked her back very gravely in the face, and remarked with a solemnity that fairly made her laugh:

"And the governor, you know, doesn't always get his tongue quite straight round his most slippery *h's*. Yet he might have been in Parliament more than once if he liked. Why, the floor of the House is literally strewn nowadays, they say, with the members' aspirates."

They sat there long, debating and fencing, Faith confident that the idea was wholly impracticable, and Thistleton determined that Faith should say *Yes* to him. But, at last, when time had gone too far, they rose, and Thistleton fired one parting shot before re-joining Mrs. Douglas at the shore by the row-boats.

"At least," he said, "I suppose I may write to you?"

Faith hesitated for a moment. She couldn't forego that innocent pleasure.

"Well, yes," she said falteringly, "you may write to me if you like. As Mr. Solomon says, 'without prejudice,' you may write to me."

The blonde young man smiled triumphant.

"Well, that settles it," he exclaimed with delight. "I shall telegraph back this evening to the governor."

"And what'll you say?" Faith asked, not wholly displeased.

"The lady accepts, but defers for the present," Thistleton answered boldly.

"But I don't accept," Faith cried. "Oh, you mustn't say that, Mr. Thistleton. I distinctly said *No* to you."

The Professor came upon them before Thistleton could reply.

"My dear young truants," he said, beaming hard on Faith through his benevolent *pinces*, "where on earth have you been hiding yourselves? I come as ambassador from the court of Mrs. Grundy. My wife has been looking for you any time this half-hour."

As they rowed home that evening, down the calm blue stream, everybody noticed that Isabel Boyton, who was one of the guests, had lost her irrepressible good spirits for once, and seemed tired and moody. She sat silent in the stern, with her arm round Ned Blair's waist, and hardly even flashed out a saucy retort when the Professor chaffed her upon her unexpected tactfulness.

But when she reached her rooms at the "Mitre," in the dusk, that night, she flung her arms wildly about her mother's neck, and

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cried out aloud, "Oh mamma, mamma, do you know what's happened? He proposed to Nea Blair to day—and she's accepted him!"

"How do you know, darling?" her mother asked, soothing her,

"I could see it," Isabel cried. "I'm sure of it! I know it! And oh, mamma, it was the title and the fun of the thing I thought of at first; no more than that; but, in the end, it was himself. I love him! I love him!"

Your American girl is the coquette pushed to its utmost limit. Who wants her may go; but who shows himself indifferent to her charms and dollars, she would die to win him.

That night, when Thistleton met Faith at the Christ Church concert, he slipped a little packet unobtrusively into her hand. Faith would have returned it, but she couldn't without attracting attention. She opened it in her own room, after Nea had left her—Nea, who had come with kisses and tears to bid her good-night, but not to tell her about her episode with Paul. It contained a short note—a very short note—and a tiny jeweller's box. The note said:

"MY DARLING FAITH,

"I was always a dutiful and obedient son, and I've felt compelled to-night to obey my father's instructions. He said I was to buy you a suitable present, and I send it herewith. I might have chosen a diamond or something of the sort, but then I know you wouldn't have worn it. This little ring will be really more serviceable.

"Your own grateful and devoted

"C. H. T.

"P.S.—Enclosed telegram just arrived from Sheffield."

Faith looked at the ring. It was simple and pretty enough; but what she liked best was his thoughtfulness in sending her those five small pearls instead of anything more showy and therefore more unsuitable. Then she turned to the telegram:

"We congratulate you warmly. We are pleased and proud. Please send a photograph."

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS BOYTON PLAYS A CARD.

NEXT morning, as Nea was busy packing, Faith burst unexpectedly into her room with a sudden impulse. To say the truth, girl that she was, she couldn't resist the temptation of showing Nea her ring, though she said nothing about the note that accompanied it. Nea admired it with a placid sigh. It would be long before Paul could give her such a ring. Not that she wanted one, of course; nobody

was less likely to think that than Nea; but, then, poor Paul must feel the difference so keenly!

She folded up the dress that lay stretched on the bed, and laid it neatly into her small portmanteau. Faith glanced at it all at once with a sharp glance of surprise.

"Why, Nea," she cried, taking it out once more and holding it in her hand, "whatever do you call this, you bad, bad creature?"

Nea blushed a guilty blush of conscious shame. She was caught in the act—fairly found out. It was an evening dress she had never worn all the time she was at Oxford.

Faith looked down into the portmanteau once more, and there in its depths caught a passing glimpse of yet another one.

"Oh, Nea," she cried, half tearful with vexation, taking it out in turn, "this is really too wicked of you. You had these two nice evening gowns here all the time, and you've only worn the old cashmere ever since you've been here on purpose not to be better dressed than I was!"

Nea gazed at these two mute witnesses to her guilt with an uncomfortable glance. Her tender little conscience would have smitten her greatly had she allowed that simple explanation of Faith's to pass unqualified.

"It wasn't altogether that," she answered, fixing her eyes on the carpet. "It was partly on your account, Faith, I don't deny, that I wouldn't wear them; but partly, also"—she hesitated for a second—"to tell you the truth, I didn't want—your brother to think I was—well—so very much more expensively dressed than you were."

She said it so simply that Faith guessed the rest, and made no answer save to fling her arms round Nea's neck and kiss her passionately. For now, she felt, they were almost sisters.

They drove to the station together, and went up—both third—in the same train to Paddington. There they parted; Nea to Cornwall, Faith to Waterloo, for Hillborough and the infants.

Her dream was over. She must go back now to the work-a-day world again.

But always with that ring and note in her pocket. For she dared not wear the ring; that would attract attention. Still, what a difference it made to her life! It would sweeten the days with the infants to feel it furtively from time to time. It would bring the dream back to her, and she would work the more easily.

Thistleton and Paul had come down to see them off at the station, and with them Miss Boyton and her inseparable mamma. Poor Isabel couldn't deny herself the pleasure of watching her victorious rival safe out of Oxford, and waving her a farewell from Paul's side on the platform. Not out of any ill-will or unkindness—of that Isabel was wholly incapable—but simply as a sort of salve to her

own feelings. Nea had engaged Paul's heart, and Isabel accepted her defeat with good grace. Not only did she bear Nea no grudge for having thus ousted her, but she kissed her a kiss of exceptional tenderness, and pressed her hand with a friendly pressure as she entered the carriage. Nea knew what the kiss and the pressure meant. Among women words are very seldom necessary to pass these little confidences from one to the other.

From the station Isabel walked back to the "Mitre" with Thistleton, allowing her mamma to take possession of Paul. She had reasons of her own for this peculiar arrangement. She wanted, in fact, to apply once more that familiar engine, the common pump, to Thistleton. And the blonde young man, being by nature a frank and confiding personage, was peculiarly susceptible to the pumping operation.

When they reached the "Mitre," Isabel deposited the obedient mamma in her own room.

"I'm going a turn round the meadows with Mr. Thistleton," she said, abruptly.

"You've a lecture at twelve, Thistleton, haven't you?" Paul asked, anxious to spare his friend Miss Boynton's society if he didn't want it.

"Oh, I'll cut the lecture!" Thistleton answered, good-humouredly. "It's Aristotle's Ethics; and I dare say Aristotle don't mind being cut. He must be used to it now, after so many centuries. Besides, a just mean between excessive zeal and undue negligence was his own ideal, you know. He should be flattered by my conscientious carrying out of his principles. I haven't missed a lecture for a whole week now. I think it's about time I should begin to miss one."

For, in fact, the blonde young man vaguely suspected, from what Isabel had told him on her way from the station, she hoped to benefit the Gascoyne family, and taking now a profound interest in all that concerned that distinguished house, of which, in spite of Faith's disclaimer, he almost considered himself at present a potential member, he was anxious to learn what her scheme might be, and to see how far it might be expected to lighten the burden of the family difficulties. Isabel, however, was too thoroughbred an American to let Thistleton see too much of her own intentions. She led him dexterously to the round seat in Christ meadows that overlooks the Cherwell, and, seating him there at close quarters, proceeded to work the pump-handle with equal skill and vigour. She succeeded so well that even Armitage himself, that past master in the art of applied hydrostatics, could hardly have surpassed her. At the end of an hour she had got out of Thistleton almost all he knew about the strange compact between the Gascoynes and Mr. Solomons. Motives of delicacy, indeed, restrained the blonde young man from mentioning the nature of the

security on which Mr. Solomons reposed his hopes of ultimate repayment—Paul's chance of marrying an heiress. He thought such a disclosure might sound a trifle personal, for the name and fame of Isabel's prospective dollars had been noised abroad far and wide both in Mentone and in Oxford. Nor did he allude in passing to his own possible future relations with the heir apparent to the baronetcy and his handsome sister. Other personal motives tied his tongue there; while as to the state of affairs between Nea and Paul he knew or guessed as less than Isabel herself did. But with these few trifling exceptions, he allowed the golden-haired Pennsylvanian to suck his brains of all his rivalling acquaintance with the Gascoyne affairs, being thoroughly convinced, like an innocent, good young man that he was, that Isabel could desire this useful knowledge for no other purpose than to further the designs of the Gascoyne family. If MacCormac Ceriolo had got hold of a young man like Thistleton she might have twisted him round her little finger, and used his information to very good account; fortunately, the American heiress had no plans in her head but such as deserved the unsuspecting undergraduate's most perfect confidence.

When Isabel had sucked her orange quite dry, she rose at last, and remarking in the cheerful American tone of virginal discovery, "It must be getting on for one: I feel like lurching," led the way back direct to the city.

As soon as she found herself in her own room at the "Mitre," however, she took out a russet-leather notebook from her pocket, and entered in it, with a neat gold pencil-case, and not without some rising tears, three short memoranda: "Judah Solomons, High Street, Hillborough, Surrey. Faith Gascoyne, 5, Plowden's Court. Drexel, Morgan and Co., Bankers, Paris."

Then she dried her eyes with a clean white handkerchief, hummed a cheerful tune for a minute or two to herself to restore her spirits, and having satisfied herself in the glass that all traces of recent weeping had disappeared, descended, smiling, to her mamma in the coffee-room.

"On Toosday," she said to her mother, with an abstracted air, as they sat down to a lunch of Transatlantic splendour, "I shall go back to London. Appears to me as if I'd had about enough now of these Oxford Colleges. There's too many of 'em at once. They run into the monotonous."

"Very well, Izzy," her mother responded, dutifully.

And on Tuesday morning, in real earnest, they were back again once more, with all their boxes, at Hatchett's Hotel in Piccadilly.

That afternoon, as Isabel, somewhat disconsolate, strolled along Bond Street, she saw a familiar figure steering its way towards her loungily on the opposite side of the street. The

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figure was attired in a faultless frock-coat and a shiny tall hat, and was booted, gloved, and cuffed to match with irreproachable exactitude. As a faint smile began to develop itself by premonition on Isabel's countenance, the figure displayed some momentary symptoms of nascent hesitation, not unmixed with an evident tendency to turn away, without the appearance of observing her, into Burlington Gardens.

Miss Boyton might be very good fun on the Promenade du Midi, but was she quite the right sort of person to acknowledge in Bond Street? The authority on the meaning of the word "scallywag" had his doubts on the subject.

Before he could carry his hesitancy into effect, however, Isabel had darted promptly across the street with American irrepressibility, and was shaking the limp gloved hand with good-humoured fervour.

"Oh my! Mr. Armitage," she said, "how funny I should meet you—you of all people in the world—right here in London."

Armitage drew himself up with stiff politeness.

"One usually does expect to meet one's friends in Bond Street," he retorted, with dignity. "And, indeed, I was here this very afternoon on the look-out for another old Mentone acquaintance whom I often meet about these parts. I mean Madame Ceriolo."

"Oh, she's in London, is she?" Isabel asked, with languid interest.

"Well, yes, she's in London," Armitage answered, cautiously. "Where, I don't know; perhaps it would be wisest not to inquire too deep. Madame Ceriolo's movements should be judged, I take it, with tolerant leniency. But she amuses me, you know—she undoubtedly amuses me." He spoke with a marked apologetic tone, as one who feels half ashamed of his own undeveloped taste. "I like to meet her and have a little chat with her now and again. She gives me a fillip. After all, one can forgive much to a person who amuses you."

"I guess that's about what we all want out of one another in this vale of tears," Isabel answered frankly.

"The philosophy of life in a nutshell," Armitage retorted, reassured. "And really, in her way, the little woman's quite presentable."

"Oh, quite presentable," Isabel answered, smiling.

"So why shouldn't one know her?" Armitage went on, with the timid air of a man who desires to be backed up in a heretical opinion. "I mean to find her out and look her up, I think. And you, Miss Boyton, what have you been doing with yourself since you left Mentone?"

The devil entered into Isabel Boyton (as he frequently does into her saucy fellow-countrywoman) and prompted her to respond with incisiveness:

"I've been up to Oxford, to see the scallywag."

"No?" Armitage cried, with a look of profound interest. "And tell me, Miss Boyton, what did you see or hear there?"

Isabel took a cruel revenge for his desire to avoid her.

"I saw Nea Blair," she said, "who was stopping at a house in Oxford, with Faith Gascoyne, the scallywag's sister; and we went out a great deal together, and saw Mr. Gascoyne and Mr. Thistleton, and a great many more. And no end of engagements and things have happened; and there's lots of news; but I'm so sorry I'm busy. I must call a hack!"

And, quick as thought, she hailed a hansom, and left the poor scandalmonger lifting his hat, alone on the pavement, tantalized.

It was a cruel revenge, but perhaps he deserved it.

Armitage would have given five pounds that moment to know all about these rumoured engagements.

Had that fellow Gascoyne succeeded in bagging the American heiress who was so sweet upon him at Mentone? And had Thistleton fallen a victim to the seeming innocence of Nea Blair? He rather suspected it. These innocent bread-and-butter messes often know, at any rate, on which side their bread's buttered. So, twenty minutes later, Armitage was expounding both apocryphal engagements to little Madame Ceriolo, whom he happened to run up against, quite by accident, of course, near the corner of Piccadilly. And little Madame Ceriolo, smiling her most winning smile, remarked confidentially that it's often the women of the world, whom everybody suspects, that have after all the most profound and disinterested affections.

As she said so, she looked most meaningfully at Armitage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"MOMMA," Miss Isabel Boyton remarked at breakfast on Wednesday morning, balancing a fragment of sole on the end of her fork, as she glanced up sideways, "you needn't worry to expect me to lunch to-day. I'm going out by myself, and I mayn't be back till somewhere near dinner-time. If you happen to be loafing around anywhere about Bond Street, I dare say you'll pick up Mr. Armitage; he's there most all the time—afternoons, he says. But if you don't, I guess you can drop in and look at the National Gallery, or something instructive and entertaining, most as well without me."

Mrs. Boyton helped herself to a third poached egg and some more broiled ham—she had the usual surprising appetite of the sallow American dyspeptic—as she answered meekly:

"Yes, indeed, Izzy. I've got to mail my

letters to your poppa this morning, and after lunch I'll fix myself up and sit out in the Park a bit."

Miss Isabel went up to her own room, and consulted Bradshaw. The high mathematical training she had received at the Harrisburg Lyceum enabled her in less than half an hour to arrive at the abstruse fact that a train for Hillborough left Victoria Station at 11.5, and that a return train might be expected at 3.17 or at 4.50. Armed with these data, and with the consciousness of virtue, she summoned a hansom—it was one of the chief joys of London in Isabel Boyton's eyes to "ride a hansom" from place to place—and commanded her driver to take her "right away" to Victoria.

Arrived at the station which bore that regal and imperial name (Isabel did just love these faint echoes of royalty, resonant through the length and breadth of modern England), she went into the telegraph-office and framed a hasty cablegram, in the imperative mood, addressed to Sylvanus P. Boyton, Philadelphia, Pa.—which last, a stertorous addition had reference, not to Mr. Boyton's respected parental relation towards herself, but to his local habitation in the State of Pennsylvania. The message itself was pithy and to the point:

"Open me a credit for three thousand pounds sterling at once at Drexel and Morgan's, Paris.

"ISABEL BOYTON."

"'Honour your father and mother' 's gone out of date," Mr. Sylvanus Boyton remarked, in his counting-house at Philadelphia, when he received that cablegram four hours earlier (by American time), "and 'Honour your sons' and daughters' cheques' has come in instead of it!" But he understood his duty in his own generation, for all that, for he telegraphed without delay, "Have advised Drexel and Morgan, according to wish. You seem to be going it."

And going it Miss Isabel undoubtedly was, in her own unconventional American fashion.

At Hillborough Station she found but a single cab in attendance. This she hailed at once, and observed in a confidential tone to the driver, "I want you to drive me to Mr. Solomons', Auctioneer and Estate Agent somewhere in the High Street; but please, in going, don't pass a place called Plowden's Court, if you can possibly help it, and don't go near the school where Miss Gascayne teaches. I don't want her to know I've come to Hillborough."

The driver smiled a curiously knowing smile; and his right eye was with difficulty prevented from winking; but he was a discreet man, as is the wont of cabmen—those involuntary depositaries of so many other folks' secrets—so he answered merely, "All right, miss; I understand!" with an air as confidential as Isabel's own, and drove her forthwith to the dingy, stinky little stuccoed house in the old-

fashioned High Street, without further comment.

Mr. Solomons was in somewhat low spirits that morning. Things generally had been using him very hard. A debtor against whom he had obtained a judgment summons had "sold up" so ill that barely enough remained, after expenses paid, to cover the principal of Mr. Solomons' debt, let alone the interest. Great Occidental Shares which he held for a rise had fallen yesterday five-eighths to three-quarters. His nephew Lionel, whom he supplied so liberally, had written again to ask for more. And, to crown all, sitting clumsily down himself with all his weight of care, he had broken an office stool, value three-and-a-penny, which would have to be replaced by a fresh article from the carpenter's. These accumulated misfortunes told heavily upon Mr. Solomons. He was distinctly out of sorts, and he would have been glad of an excuse to vent his ill-humour, if occasion turned up, upon some fitting object.

Nevertheless, when he saw a pretty young lady with golden hair—slim, too slim for Mr. Solomons' Oriental taste, but still distinctly good-looking, and dressed with the nameless incommunicable charm of American plutocracy—descend at his own door and enter his office, doubtless on business thoughts intent, professional spirit rose so triumphant in Mr. Solomons' breast that he advanced to meet the pretty young lady, smiling a smile of ten house-and-estate-agent power of persuasion. He saw in her, with the eye of faith, that valuable acquisition to the professional man—a new client. The new client was probably come to inquire for a furnished villa at Hillborough for the summer season. Mr. Solomons had always many such inquiries in July and August.

The young lady, however, declined the suggestion of wanting a house. She was in a hurry, she said—in a very great hurry, might she speak with Mr. Solomons half an hour—alone—on strictly private business?

Mr. Solomons rose, and led the way upstairs with a beating heart. Sixty years of resolute bachelorhood had made him wary. Could the lady's little game by any possibility be breach of promise? He trembled at the idea. If only Leo were here now to listen unobtrusively and act as witness through the medium of the key-hole. But to face her alone, unsupported even by the office-boy's evidence—the bare notion of such damages as the Court might award was really too appalling.

The young lady, however, soon set his doubts on that score at rest. She went straight to the point with Transatlantic directness. Mr. Solomons had certain bonds, notes, or acceptances of Mr. Paul Gascayne's, of Christ Church, Oxford. How much were they for? And what would Mr. Solomons take, in a lump, for them?

At this astounding proposition, fired at

his head point-blank, without explanation or introduction, without even a knowledge of the young lady's name, Mr. Solomons' breath came and went painfully, and a curious conflict of doubt and hope took possession of his bosom. He was a business man, and he must know more about this offer before he even admitted the existence of the bonds. Who knew but that the strange young lady wanted to rob and murder him!

So Mr. Solomons temporised. By long and slow degrees he drew out of Isabel the various facts that she was a rich American; that she had met Paul Gaseoyne at Mentone and Oxford; that she wished to get the bonds into her own hands; and that, apparently, she was well disposed towards the parties of the first part in those valuable documents.

On the other hand, he gathered, by various suggestive side-hints, that the young lady was not aware of the precise position of Paul's father, beyond the fact that he was a baronet of the United Kingdom in very small circumstances; and, further, that she had no sort of authority from Paul himself to make any offer whatsoever for the documents in question. She was prepared to buy them, she said, for their fair money value in prompt cash, and she would engage to cause the parties of the first part no unnecessary trouble in the matter of repayment.

Mr. Solomons' heart, like the Homeric hero's, was divided two ways within him at this singular application. He had never concealed from himself, and his nephew Lionel had certainly not concealed from him, the painful fact that these bonds were a very doubtful and problematical security. He had ventured much on a cock-and-bull scheme—a little private mare's-nest of his own invention; and he had trembled for years for his precious money. And, here, now, was the very heiress, the *doux ex machina* (or *dea*, if we must speak by the card, lest equivocation undo us), who was to relieve him from all his financial follies, and justify his daring, and marry Paul, and make repayment certain. Nay, more than that, as Mr. Solomons read the problem, the heiress was even prepared to pay up beforehand, in order to relieve her future husband from the weight of debt, and put him in a better way, no doubt, for building up for himself a position in life and Society.

Mr. Solomons held his double chin between finger and thumb as he pondered deeply. A very strong bait, no doubt, this offer of prompt cash—a very strong bait indeed to human cupidity.

And yet two other feelings rose powerful at once in Mr. Solomons' mind—two strange, deep feelings. The first was this: If here was the heiress who indeed was ready to marry Paul, and save him at once from all his struggles and difficulties, why should Mr. Solomons let her discount him, as it were, at present value, and so get him cheap, when, by

holding on till the end, and selling dear, he would reap the full benefit himself of his long investment? What's the use of embarking in a doubtful speculation if you don't expect to get well repaid, cent. per cent., in the end for it? How foolish to get frightened with land in sight, so to speak, and forego the harvest of your own wise adventurousness! Why, Mr. Solomons would like to hold on, if for nothing else, in order to show his nephew Leo he was wrong after all, and that Paul would book his heiress at last, and pay up, like a young man of honour as he was, to the uttermost farthing. Twenty per cent., and annual renewals, with discount off for the extra risk to start with—and to the uttermost farthing.

And the second feeling? Ah, that Mr. Solomons hardly even admitted to his own soul. He would have been ashamed, as a business man, to admit it. But it was there, nevertheless, vague and undetermined, a genuine sentiment, in some undercurrent of consciousness. Had he not conceived all this scheme himself, and risked his solid cash on the chimerical proposition? Was it not he who had put Paul to school and college, and thus acquired, as it were, a proprietary interest in him? Wasn't Paul's success in life his own business now? Had he backed it so long, and would he hedge at the last moment in favour of a stranger? And what stranger? Whatever did he know of this queer young lady, who had dropped down upon him from the clouds, with her brusque, sharp manners and her eager American promptitude? Why sell Paul's future to her or to anyone? Was not Paul his by right of investment, and should not he run him on his own account, to win or to lose, as the chances of the game of life would have it? The gambling spirit was strong in Mr. Solomons, after all. Having backed his horse, he liked to stand by him like a thorough-going sportsman. No hedging for him. And a certain sneaking human regard for Paul made him say to himself, "Why hand him over, bound body and soul, to a golden-haired young lady from parts unknown, whose motives for buying him of me are, after all, doubtful?"

So he stared at Isabel hard as he opened his safe and took out the precious documents with trembling fingers. Then he said, "The total sum up to date comes to a trifle over fifteen hundred pounds sterling."

"Only fifteen hundred?" Isabel cried with a start. "And he makes all that fuse over fifteen hundred pounds! Why, say, Mr. Solomons, I'll give you two thousand, money down, for the lot, and we'll make it a bargain."

Mr. Solomons drew a deep breath and hesitated. Four hundred and seventy odd pounds clear profit—besides the compound interest at twenty per cent.—was more than his fondest wish had ever anticipated. Such a young woman as that, properly worked, would indeed be a perfect mine of wealth for a capitalist to

draw upon. He looked at her long, and his heart faltered. Four hundred and seventy odd pounds! "Well, what do you want them for?" he asked at last, cautiously.

"That's my business, I guess," Isabel answered with sharp decisiveness. "To! burn 'em if I choose, perhaps. When I buy things at a store, I don't usually expect to tell the dry-goods man what I want to do with them."

Mr. Solomons eyed her with an inquisitive look. "Let's be plain and aboveboard with one another," he said. "Do you intend to marry him?"

"Oh my, no," Isabel answered at once, with prompt decision that carried conviction in its very tone immediately.

Mr. Solomons was nonplussed. "You don't want to marry him?" he exclaimed, taken aback.

"No, I ain't going to marry him," Isabel answered stoutly, just altering the phrase into closer accordance with the facts of the case, but otherwise nodding a bland acquiescence. "I ain't going to marry him, I give you my word, Mr. Solomons."

"Then what do you want?" Mr. Solomons asked, all amazed.

"I want those papers," Isabel answered with persistence.

Mr. Solomons rose, faltered for a second, replaced them in their pigeon-hole with a decided air, looked the safe, and put the key in his pocket. Then he turned round to Isabel with a very gracious smile, and observed politely:

"Have a glass of wine, miss?"

It was his mode of indicating with graceful precision that the question between them was settled—in the negative.

Against the rock of that decisive impassive attitude the energetic little American broke herself in wide foam of entreaties and expostulations, all in vain. She stormed, begged, prayed, and even condescended to burst into tears, but all to no purpose. Mr. Solomons, now his mind was once made up, remained hard as adamant. All she could obtain from Solomons was the solemn promise that he would keep this fruitless negotiation a dead secret from Paul and Faith, and would never even mention the fact of her visit to Hillborough. Thus reassured, the kind-hearted little Pennsylvania dried her eyes, and, refusing in return to make Mr. Solomons the confidant of her name, descended the stairs once more, wondering and disappointed.

"Shall I call you a cab, miss?" Mr. Solomons asked, politely, as he went down by her side.

"Thank you, I've gotten one waiting," Isabel answered, trying hard to look unconcerned. "Will you tell the man to drive to the best place in the village where I can get something to eat?" For Americans the fact of the existence of towns—to them, anything that isn't a city is a mere village.

But when Mr. Solomons saw the driver of Isabel's cab, he gave a sudden little start of surprise, and exclaimed involuntarily, "Why, bless my soul, Gascoyne, it's you, is it? The young lady wants to be driven to the 'Golden Lion.'"

Isabel Boyton drew back, herself surprised in her turn. "You don't mean to say," she cried, looking hard at the cabman, "this is Mr. Gascoyne's father?"

Mr. Solomons nodded a nod of acquiescence. Isabel gazed at him with a good hard stare, as one gazes at a new wild beast in the Zoo, and then held out her hand frankly. "May I shake hands with you?" she said. "Thank you very much. You see, it'll be something for me to tell my friends when I get back home to America that I've shaken hands with an English baronet."

At the "Golden Lion" she paused as she paid him. "You're a man of honour, I suppose?" she said, hesitating slightly.

And the English baronet answered with truth, "I 'opes I are, miss."

"Then I trust you, Mr. Gascoyne, Sir Emery, or whatever else it ought to be," she went on, seriously. "You won't mention either to your son or your daughter that you drove an American lady to-day to Mr. Solomons' office."

The English baronet touched his hat respectfully. "Not if I was to die for it, miss," he answered, with warmth; for the honest grasp of Isabel's hand had touched some innermost chord of his nature till it resounded strangely.

But Isabel went in to gulp down her lunch with a regretful sense of utter failure. She hadn't succeeded in making things easier, as she had hoped, for Paul and Nea.

And the English baronet and Mr. Solomons kept their troth like men. Paul and Faith never knew Isabel Boyton had visited Hillborough, and Mr. Solomons himself never learnt the name of his mysterious little golden-haired American visitor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HONOURS.

ALL the rest of that term at Oxford was a dull one for Paul. As soon as Faith and Nea "went down" (to use the dear old Oxford phrase) he set to work with redoubled vigour at his reading, and went in at last for his final examination. Upon that examination much, very much, depended. If only he could gain a First, he would stand a fair chance in time for a Fellowship; and a Fellowship would allow him leisure to look around and to lay his plans for slowly repaying Mr. Solomons. But if he succeeded merely in attaining a Second or Third, his prospects of a Fellowship would be greatly decreased, and with them the probability of his shaking off that load of debt

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that clogged and oppressed him in all his schemes for the future.

He knew, of course, that the necessity for taking pupils during his undergraduate years told heavily against him. No man can row in two boats at once; and the time he had used up in reading with Thistleton and his other pupils had been so much subtracted from the time he ought to have devoted to his own reading. Still, he was able, undeniably able; and little disposed to overestimate his own powers as he was, he had, nevertheless, a dim consciousness in his own soul that, given even chances, he was more than a match for most of his contemporaries. He had worked hard, meanwhile, to make up for lost time; and he went into the examination cheered and sustained by the inspiring thought that Nea Blair's eyes were watching his success or failure from afar in Cornwall.

Day after day he worked and wrote in those dreary schools; deep in Aristotle, Plato, Grote, and Mommsen. Night after night he compared notes with his competitors, and marked the strong or weak points of their respective compositions. As time went on his spirits rose higher. He was sure he was doing himself full justice in his papers. He was sure that he had to say upon most of the questions asked in the schools was more original and more philosophical than the ideas and opinions of any of his neighbours. He felt quite at ease about his success now. And if only once he could get his First, he was pretty sure of a Fellowship, and of some chance at least of repaying Mr. Solomons.

At last the examination was over, the papers sent in, and nothing remained but that long, weary delay while the examiners are glancing over the tops of the answers and pretending to estimate the relative places of the candidates. Paul waited and watched with a yearning heart. How much hung for him on the issue of that dreaded class-list!

On the day when it came out, nailed up according to Oxford wont on the doors of the schools, he stole into the quadrangle half an hour late—he couldn't bear to be there with the first eager rush—and looked among the G's in the First Class for the name of Gascoyne.

It was with a thrill of surprise—only surprise at first—that he noticed the list went straight from Galt to Groves; there was no Gascoyne at all in the place where he expected it. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Surely some mistake; for the names go in each class in alphabetical order. G-a-l, G-a-s, G-r-o. Had they misspelt it somehow? Then, all at once, the truth flashed across his mind in a horrible revelation. The truth, or part of it. His name wasn't put in the First Class at all! He must have taken a Second!

For a moment he could hardly believe his eyes. It was all too strange, all too incredible. He had worked so hard, he had deserved it so well! But still he must face the worst like a

man. He fixed his glance steadily on the Second Class. Farrington, Flood, Galbraith, Girdlestone. He rubbed his eyes once more. Was he going mad on the spot? Or had the examiners neglected to place him altogether?

With a vague sinking feeling about his left breast, he glanced down yet lower to where the Third Class filled up its two much longer columns. About half-way down, his eye caught his own name with that miraculous rapidity which enables one always to single out those familiar words on a printed page from a thousand others. "Gascoyne, Paulus, ex Æde Christi." Yes, yes, it was too true. There was no denying it. A Third—the lowest of all classes in Honours—was all he had got for all his toil and trouble!

He reeled as he stood, sick—sick with disappointment.

How had it happened? Who knows? Who can say? It's the greatest mistake in the world to suppose the best men always come uppermost. If a board of Third Class men in after-life were to examine their examiners, it is highly probable they might often turn the tables on the dons who misplaced them. *Humanum est errare*, and examiners are human. They often make blunders, like all the rest of us, and they added one more to that long list of mistakes when they gave Paul Gascoyne a Third in Finals.

The fact is, Paul was original; and Oxford, like Mr. Peter Magnus, hates originality. A decorous receptivity is what it most prefers. It likes a human mind to be modelled on the phonographic pattern—prompt to take in exactly what it is told, and ready to give it out once more, precisely as inspired, whenever you turn the barrel on again by pressing the handle. In Paul's essays, the examiners detected some flavour of ideas which appeared to them wholly unfounded on any opinions set forth by Professor Jowett or Mr. T. H. Green, of Balliol; and, shocked at this revolt from established usage, they relegated their author to a Third Class, accordingly.

But Paul for the moment knew none of these things. He was only aware that a crushing blow had fallen upon him unexpectedly; and he went back inconsolable to his own rooms in Peckwater, where he sported his oak, or big outer door, flung himself passionately into his easy-chair, and had his bad hour alone by himself in unutterable misery. It was hard to have worked so long and so well for so bitter a disappointment. But these things happen often, and will happen always, as long as men consent to let themselves be measured by a foot-rule measurement like so many yards of brick and mortar. They are the tribute we pay to the examination Juggernaut. It crushes the best, and rolls unscathed over the bodies of the hardest.

Paul lunched alone; he was incapable of going into Thistleton's rooms, as he often did for luncheon. But at two o'clock he heard a

loud knocking at his big oak door—contrary to all established rules of University etiquette; for when once a man fastens that outer barrier of his minor castle, he is supposed to be ill, or out of town, or otherwise engaged, and inaccessible for the time being even to his nearest and dearest intimates. However, he opened it, regardless of the breach, and found Thistleton waiting for him on the landing, very red faced. The blonde young man grasped his hand hard with a friendly pressure.

"Gascayne!" he cried, bursting, and hardly able to gasp with stifled indignation, "this is just atrocious. It's wicked; it's incredible! I know who it was. Confound his impudence. It was that beast Pringle. Let's go round to John's, and punch his ugly old head for him."

In spite of his disappointment, Paul smiled bitterly. Of what good would it be to punch the senior examiner's head, now that irrevocable class-list had once been issued?

"I wanted to be alone, Thistleton," he said; "it is almost more than I can bear in company. It isn't for myself, you know, but for—for the heavy claims that weigh upon me. However, since you've come and broken my oak, let's go down the river to Sandford Leaker in a tub-pair and work it off. There's nothing like muscular effort to carry away these things. If I don't work, I feel as if I could sit down and cry like a girl. What I feel most is—the gross injustice of it."

And gross injustice is quite inevitable as long as men think a set of meritorious and hard-working schoolmasters can be trusted to place in strict order of merit the pick and flower of intelligent young Englishmen. The vile examination system has in it nothing viler than this all but certain chance of crushing at the outset by want of success in a foolish race, the cleverest, most vivid, and most original geniuses.

They went down the river, Thistleton still protesting his profound intention of punching Pringle's head, and as they rowed and rowed, Paul gradually worked off the worst of his emotion. Then he came back, and dined alone, to try and accommodate himself to his new position.

All his plans in life had hitherto been based upon the tacit assumption that he would take a First—an assumption in which he had been duly backed by all who knew him—and now that he found himself stranded on the bank with a Third, instead, he had to begin and reconsider his prospects in the world, under the terrible weight of this sudden disillusionment. A Fellowship would now, no doubt, be a practical impossibility; he must turn his attention to some other opening—if any.

But the more he thought, the less he saw his way clear before him. And, in effect, what can a young man of promise, but without capital, and backed only by a Third in Greats, find to turn his hand to in these latter days in this jammed and overstocked realm of

England? Of what practical use to him now was this costly education, for which he had mortgaged his whole future for years in advance to Mr. Solomons? The Bar could only be entered after a long and expensive apprenticeship, and even then he would in all probability do nothing but swell the noble ranks of briefless barristers. Medicine required an equally costly and tedious novitiate. From the Church he was cut off by want of sufficient faith or natural vocation. No man can become a solicitor off hand, any more than he can become a banker, a brewer, or a landed proprietor.

Paul ran over all conceivable professions rapidly in his mind, and saw none open before him save that solitary refuge of the destitute—to become a schoolmaster; and even that, with a Third in Greats for his sole recommendation, would certainly be by no means either easy or remunerative.

And, then, Mr. Solomons. What would Mr. Solomons say to such a move? He would never allow his *protégé* to take to schoolmastering. Mr. Solomons' ideals for him were all so different. He always figured to himself Paul taking his proper place in Society as the heir to a baronetcy, and there captivating and capturing that supposititious heiress by the charms of his person and the graces of his high-born aristocratic manners. But to become a schoolmaster! In Mr. Solomons' eyes that would be simply to throw away the one chance of success. What he wanted was to see Paul living in good chambers in London, and moving about among the great world, where his prospective title would mean in the end money or money's worth for him. If the heir of all the Gascaynes had to descend to the drudgery of mere schoolmastering, it would be necessary to have an explanation with Mr. Solomons; and then—and then his father's dream must vanish for ever.

How could he ever have been foolish enough in such circumstances to speak to Nea? His heart misgave him that he had been so unkind and so cruel. He would have bartered his eyes now if only he could undo the past. And even as he thought so, he unfastened his desk and, so weak is man, sat down to write a passionate appeal for advice and sympathy and aid from Nea.

He could never marry her. But she would always be his. And it calmed his soul somehow to write to Nea.

As he wrote a knock came at the sported oak—the sharp double rap that announces a telegram. He opened the door and took it from the bearer.

"To Paul Gascayne, Christ Church, Oxford.

"Mrs. Douglas has telegraphed me result of class-list. Your disappointment is my disappointment. I feel it deeply, but send you all sympathy. You must take to literature now.

"NRA."

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He flung himself back in his easy-chair once more, and kissed the flimsy bit of cheap paper fervently. Then, Nea had taken the trouble to arrange beforehand with Mrs. Douglas for a telegram. Nea had been puzzling her head about the self-same problems. Nea had felt for him in his day of humiliation. He would work away yet, and clear himself for Nea. Mr. Solomons should still be paid off somehow. And sooner or later he must marry Nea.

Till that night he had never even dared to think it. But just then, in his deepest hour of despair, that bold thought came home to him as a fresh spur to effort. Impossible, incredible, unattainable as it seemed, he would pay off all and marry Nea.

The resolve alone was worth something.

Mechanically he rose and went to his desk once more. This time he pulled out a clean sheet of foolscap. The need for an outlet was strong upon him now. He took up his pen, and almost without thinking sat down and wrote furiously and rapidly. He wrote as he had rowed that afternoon to Sandford Lasher, in the wild desire to work off his excitement and depression in some engrossing occupation. He wrote far into the small hours of the morning, and when he had finished some seven or eight closely-written foolscap sheets, he spent another long time in correcting and repolishing them. At last he got up and strolled off to bed. He had followed Nea's advice, red-hot at the moment. He had written for dear life. All other means failing, he had taken to literature.

And that is about the way we all of us who live by the evil trade first took to it.

CHAPTER XXV.

COMPENSATION.

As it happened, that most terrible disappointment in all his life was probably the luckiest thing on earth that could possibly have befallen Paul Gascoyne. Had he taken a First, and then gained a fellowship, he would doubtless have remained up at Oxford for many years to come, plodding and coaching, leading a necessarily expensive and useless life, and paying off Mr. Solomons but very slowly by long-deferred instalments out of his scanty savings. As it was, however, being thus cast adrift on the world upon his own resources, he was compelled more frankly to face life for himself, and to find some immediate paying work, which would enable him to live by hook or by crook, as best he might, over the next six months or so. And that prompt necessity for earning his salt proved, in fact, his real salvation. Not, of course, that he gave up at once the idea of a Fellowship. He was too brave a man to let even a Third in Greats deter him from having a final fling at the hopelessly unattainable. A week later he went in for the

very first vacancy that turned up, and missed it nobly, being beaten by a thick-headed Balliol Scot, who knew by heart every opinion of every recognised authority on everything earthly, from Plato and Aristotle down to John Stuart Mill and Benjamin Jowett. So having thus finally buried his only chance of University preferment before October term, Paul set to work with a brave heart to look about him manfully for some means of livelihood that might tide him over the summer vacation.

His first idea—the stereotyped first idea of every unemployed young Oxford man—was of course to get pupils. But pupils for the "Long" don't grow on every bush; and here again that strange divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may, proved kindly favourable to him. Not a single aspirant answered his intimation, only hung among a dozen or so equally attractive announcements on the notice-board of the Union, that "Mr. Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, would be glad to read with pupils for 'Mods.' during the Long Vacation." Thus thrown upon his beam-ends by the necessities of the case, Paul was fairly compelled to follow Nea's advice and "take to literature."

But "taking to literature" is not so easy as it sounds to those who have never tried it. Everybody can write nowadays, thanks to the Board Schools, and brave the supreme difficulty of the literary profession. An open trade—a trade which needs no special apprenticeship—is always overstocked. Every gate is thronged with suitors: all the markets overflow. And so Paul hardly dared to hope even for the modest success which may keep a bachelor in bread-and-butter. Bread-and-butter is much, indeed, to expect from one's brains in these latter days, when dry bread is the lot of most literary aspirants. Little as he knew of the perils of the way, Paul trembled to think what fate might have in store for him.

Nevertheless, on the very night of his bitter disappointment over the Oxford class-list, he had sat down and written off that hasty article—a mere playful sketch of a certain phase of English life as he well knew it, for he was not without his sense of humour; and reading it over at his leisure the succeeding morning he saw that, though not quite so good as he thought it the night before, in his feverish earnestness, it was still by no means wanting in point and brilliancy. So, with much fear and trembling, he enclosed it in an envelope, and sent it off, with a brief letter commendatory, to the dreaded editor of the *Monday Remembrancer*. And then, having fired his bolt in the dark, he straightway tried to forget all about it, for fear of its entailing on him still further disappointment.

For a week or ten days he waited in vain, during which time he occupied all his spare moments in trying his 'prentice hand at yet other articles. For, indeed Paul hardly

understood himself as yet how strait is the gate and how narrow is the way by which men enter into even that outer vestibule of journalism. He little knew how many proffered articles are in most cases "declined with thanks" before the most modest little effusion stands a stray chance of acceptance from the journalistic magnates. Most young men think it a very easy thing to "write for the papers." It is only when they come to see the short shrift their own best efforts obtain from professional critics that they begin to understand how coy and shy and hard to woo is the uncertain modern Muse who presides unseen over the daily printing-press. But of all this Paul was still by rare good luck most innocently ignorant. Had he known it all, brave and sturdy as he was, he might have fallen down and fainted perchance on the threshold.

At the end of ten days, however, to his deep delight, a letter came back from that inexorable editor—a cautious letter, neither accepting nor rejecting Paul's proffered paper, but saying in guarded roundabout language that if Mr. Gascoyne happened to be in town any time next week the editor could spare him just twenty minutes' private conversation.

By a curious coincidence Paul was in town early next week, and the inexorable editor, sitting with watch open before him to keep jealous guard lest Paul might exceed the stipulated twenty minutes, expounded to him with crude editorial frankness his views about his new contributor's place in journalism.

"Have you ever written before?" the editor asked him sharply, yet with the familiar wearied journalistic air (as of a man who has sat up all night at a leader), pouncing down upon him like a hawk upon a lark, from under his bushy eyebrows.

Paul admitted with some awe, and no little diffidence, that this was his first peccadillo in that particular direction—the one error of an otherwise blameless existence.

"Of course," the editor answered, turning over his poor foolscap with a half-contemptuous hand, "I saw that at a glance. I read it in the style or want of style. I didn't need to be told so. I only asked by force of habit for further confirmation. Well, you know, Mr. Gascoyne, there's no use disguising the fact. You can't write—no, you can't write—you can't write worth a kick, or anything like it!" and he snapped down his mouth with a vicious snap as one snaps a rat-trap demonstratively between one's thumb and finger.

"No?" Paul said, in an interrogative voice and somewhat crestfallen, much wondering why, in that case, the busy editor, who measured his minutes strictly by the watch, had taken the trouble to send for him all the way up from Oxford.

"No, indeed you can't," the editor answered, argumentative, like one who expects to be contradicted, but won't brook contradiction.

"Just look here at *this* now, and at *this*, and *this*," and as he spoke the great man rapidly scored with his pencil one or two of the most juvenile faults of style in Paul's neatly-written but undeniably amateurish little essay.

Paul was forced to admit to himself, as the editor scored them, that these particular constructions were undoubtedly weak. They smelt of youth and of inexperience, and he trembled for himself as the editor went on with merciless quill to correct and alter them into rough accordance with the *Remembrancer's* own exalted literary standard. Through the whole eight pages or so the editor ran lightly with practised pen—enlarging here, contracting there, brightening yonder—exactly as Paul had seen the tutors at Christ Church amend the false concords or doubtful quantities in a passman's faulty Latin verses. The rapidity and certainty of the editor's touch, indeed, was something surprising. Paul saw for himself, as the ruthless censor proceeded in the task, that his workmanship was really very bad. He felt instinctively how crude and youthful were his own vain attempts at the purveyance of literature. At the end, when the editor had disfigured his whole beautiful, neatly-written article with illegible scratches, cabalistic signs, and frequent alterations, the poor young man looked down at it with a sigh and half-injured below his breath:

"Then, of course, you don't intend to print it?"

The editor, for all reply, sounded a small gong by his side and waited. In answer to the summons, a boy, somewhat the worse for lamp-black, entered the august presence and stood attentive for orders. The editor handed him the much-altered pages with a lordly wave. "Press!" he said, laconically, and brushed him aside. The boy nodded, and disappeared as in a pantomime.

Then the editor glanced at his watch once more. He ran his fingers once or twice through his hair with a preoccupied air and stared straight in front of him. For a minute he hummed and mused as if alone. After that he woke up suddenly and answered with a start: "Yes I do, though; I mean to print it—as amended. A great *deal* of it will have to come out, of course; but I mean to print it."

"Thank you very much," Paul called, overpowered.

"And I'll tell you why," the editor went on, never heeding his thanks—to editors all that is mere contributors' business. "It isn't *written* a bit; oh, dear no, not *written*; but it's *real*—it has stuff in it."

"I'm so glad you think so," Paul exclaimed, brightening.

The editor cut him short with a rapid wave of his imperious pen. Editors have no time to let themselves be thanked or talked to. "You have something to write about," he

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“Well, you can go, anyway, and put in the ‘osses,’ he answered reluctantly.”

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said, "something new and fresh. In one word, '*Vous connaissez votre monde,*' and that's just what's wanted nowadays in journalism. We require *spécialités*. A man who knows all about the Chicago pork trade's a more useful man to us by a hundred guineas than a fellow who can write well in limpid English on any blessed subject under heaven you may set him. '*Nullum tetigit quod non ornavit*'—Dean Swift and the broomstick—all moonshine nowadays! Crispness and originality are more drugs in the market. What we want is the men who have the actual stuff in them. Now, *you* have the stuff in you. You know your world. This article shows you thoroughly understand the manners and modes of thought of the *petite bourgeoisie*."

"I belong to them, in fact," Paul put in, interrupting him.

The editor received the unnecessary information with polite indifference. For his part, it mattered nothing on earth to him whether his contributor were a duke or a Manchu Tartar. What mattered was the fact that he had something to communicate. He nodded, yawned, and continued listlessly:

"Quite so," he said. "You understand the class. Our readers belong to a different order. They're mostly gentlefolks. You seem from your article to be a greengrocer's assistant. Therefore you've got something fresh to tell them. This is an age when Society's consumed with a burning desire to understand its own component elements. Half the world wants to know, for the first time in its life, how the other half lives, just to spite the proverb. *The desire's* incomprehensible, but still it exists; and the journalist thrives by virtue of recognising all actualities. If you refuse to recognise the actual—like the *Planet* and the *Matutinal Herald*, for example—you go to the wall as sure as fate. Mr.—ah'm—where's your card?—ah, yes—Gaseoyno, we shall want a series of a dozen or so of these articles."

Paul hardly knew how to express his thanks. The editor cut him short with a weary wave.

"And mind," he said, drawing, "no quotations from Juvenal. You're an Oxford man, I see. Young man, if you would prosper, avoid your Juvenal. University men always go wrong on that. They can't keep Juvenal out of modern life and newspaper leaders. You've no less than three tags from the Third Satire, I observe, in this one short article. Three tags from the classics at a single go would damn the best middle that ever was penned. Steer clear of them in future, and try to be actual. Your articles 'll want a great deal of hacking and hewing, of course; I shall have to prune them; but, still, you've the stuff in you." He glanced at his watch uneasily once more. "The first next Wednesday," he went on, with a significant look towards the door. "I'm very busy just at present." His hand was fumbling nervously among his papers

now. He rang the little gong a second time. "Proof of the 'Folly of the Government,'" he remarked to the boy. "Good-morning, Mr.—Gaseoyno. Please don't forget. Not later than Wednesday."

"Please don't forget!" As if it was likely, or as if he suffered from such a plethora of work that he would fail to supply it! Why, the very chance of such an engagement as that made him wild with excitement. And Paul Gaseoyno went down the wooden steps that afternoon a happy man, and a real live journalist on the staff of the *Monday Remembrancer*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN INTRODUCTION.

"*NEMO repente fit turpissimus*": and nobody becomes by design a journalist. Men drift into the evil trade as they drift into drink, crime, or politics—by force of circumstances. They take it up first because they've nothing else ready to hand to do, and they go on with it because they see no possible way of getting out of it. Paul Gaseoyno, however, by way of the exception to every rule, having thus unexpectedly drifted into the first head-waters of a journalistic career, began seriously to contemplate making his work in life of it. In this design he was further encouraged by the advice and assistance of Mr. Solomons, who would have energetically protested against anything so vulgar as schoolmastering, as being likely to interfere with his plans for Paul's brilliant future, but who considered an occasional excursion into the domain of literature as by no means derogatory to the dignity even of one who was destined to become, in course of time, a real live baronet. Nay; Mr. Solomons went so far in his commendation of the craft as to dwell with peculiar pride and pleasure on the career of a certain noble lord who was not ashamed in his day to take his three guineas a column from a distinguished weekly, and who afterwards, by the unexpected demise of an elder brother, rose to the actual dignity of a British marquise. These things being so, Mr. Solomons opined that Paul, though born to shine in courts, might blamelessly contribute to the *Monday Remembrancer*, and might pocket his more modest guinea without compunction in such excellent company. For what company can be better than that of the Lords of the Council, endured, as we all well know them to be, with grace, wisdom, and understanding?

Moreover, Mr. Solomons had other ideas of his own for Paul in his head. It would be so well for Leo to improve his acquaintance with the future bearer of the Gaseoyno title; and it would be so well for Paul to keep up his connection with the house of Solomons by thus associating from time to time with Mr. Lionel. For this double-barrelled purpose

Mr. Solomons suggested that Paul should take rooms in the same house with Lionel, and that they should to some extent share expenses together, so far as breakfast, lights, and firing were concerned. From which acute suggestion Mr. Solomons expected a double advantage—as the wisdom of our ancestors has proverbially phrased it, he would kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, Paul and Lionel would naturally be thrown much into one another's society, and, on the other hand, Lionel's living expenses would be considerably diminished by Paul's co-operation.

To Paul himself the arrangement was a trifle less satisfactory. Mr. Lionel Solomons was hardly the sort of person he would have spontaneously chosen as the friend and companion of his enforced solitude. Paul's tastes and ideas had undergone a considerable modification at Oxford, and he was well aware of the distinctions of tone which marked off Mr. Lionel from the type of men with whom he had now long been accustomed to associate. But still, he never dreamt of opposing himself in this matter to Mr. Solomons' wishes. The habit of acquiescence in all Mr. Solomons' plans for his future had been so impressed upon his mind by constant use that he could hardly throw it off in a month or two; and he went uncomplainingly, if not quite cheerfully, to share the hospitality of Mr. Lionel's rooms in a small back street off a Pimlico highway.

For the first few weeks Paul was busy enough, endeavouring to gain himself an entry into the world of journalism. And by great good luck his preliminary efforts were unexpectedly, and it must be confessed unwontedly, successful. As a rule, it is only by long and strenuous pushing that even good workmen succeed in making their way into that most crowded and difficult of all trades or professions. But there is luck in everything, even in journalism; and Paul herein was exceptionally lucky. Mrs. Douglas, feeling herself almost personally responsible for his mishap in *Cronin*—for if only she had nobbled the examiners in time, might she not have managed to secure for him at least a decent second?—undertook to make up for her remissness on that important occasion by using all her best backstairs wiles and blandishments on the persons of all the editors and leader-writers of her wide acquaintance. Now, the London press, as is well known to those curious in such matters, is almost entirely manned and run by Oxford graduates. Among those magnates of the journalistic world Mrs. Douglas possessed no small feminine influence; her dearest friend was married to the staff of the *Times*, and two of her second cousins were respectively engaged to the French politics of the *Planet* and the art-journalism of its *Hebdomadal Correspondent*. By desperately employing her persuasive powers on these potent ladies, Mrs. Douglas managed to secure for Paul's maiden efforts

the difficult favour of editorial consideration. The rest Paul worked on his own account. For although, as his first editor had justly remarked, he couldn't write worth a kink when he began his experiments, he sat down so resolutely to conquer the intricacies of English style, that before three weeks were fairly over his manuscript made as decent copy as that of many journalists to the manner born, with less brains and perception than the young Oxford postulant.

It was during these first weeks of tollsome apprenticeship that an event happened of great importance to Paul's future history, though at the moment he himself saw in it nothing more than the most casual incident of everyday existence.

One Saturday afternoon Mr. Lionel returned home early from the City, on fashionable promenade intent, and proposed to Paul to accompany him to the Park, to take the air and inspect the marriageable young ladies of this isle of Britain there on view to all and sundry. "Let's have a squint at the girls," indeed, was Mr. Lionel's own precise and classical suggestion for their afternoon's entertainment.

For a moment Paul demurred. "I want to get this article finished," he said, looking up from his paper with a rather wearied air. "I'm trying one on spec. for the *Monthly Intelligencer*."

"Rot!" Mr. Lionel ejaculated, with profound emphasis. "You're working too hard, Gascoyne; that's just what's the matter with you. We don't work like that in the City, I can tell you. You're muddling your brains with too much writing. Much better come out for a walk with me this afternoon, and do the Park. You can't expect to hook an heiress, you know, if you don't let the heiresses see you put yourself in evidence. Besides, your article 'll be all the better for a little freshening up. You're getting dull for want of change. Come along with me to the Row, and you'll see what'll stir up your Pegasus to a trot, I'll bet you fourpence." Even in metaphor, forcefulness was Mr. Lionel's extreme extravagance in the matter of risking money needlessly.

Paul sighed a faint sigh. He had never yet dared to confide to Mr. Lionel the painful announcement that he was no longer intent on the prospective pursuit of the British heiress, but he admitted to himself the justice of the other plea that he needed change; for, indeed, of late he had been sticking a great deal too close to the literature of his country. So, after a moment's hesitation, he rose from his desk, and putting off his working coat, undressed himself in his best editor-visiting clothes for the afternoon's stroll, and sallied forth into the street with Mr. Lionel.

As they went towards the Park, Mr. Lionel regaled his fellow-lodger with various amusing anecdotes of Mr. Solomons' cuteness, and of

the care with which he audited his nephew's accounts, paying special attention to the item of sundries in the expenditure column. At these anecdotes Paul was somewhat surprised, for Mr. Solomons had always seemed to him lavish in only one respect: and that was on Mr. Lionel's personal expenses. He had fancied, indeed—and he still continued to fancy—that Mr. Solomons spoilt his nephew. That was not Mr. Lionel's own opinion, however. He descanted much upon his uncle's "closeness," and upon his want of sympathy with a fellow's natural wish to "see life."

"Never mind, though," Mr. Lionel remarked at last, with a significant gesture of his protruding lips. "The two old men'll drop off before long; and then, Gascoyne, you and I will have our innings."

Paul was shocked at the heartless levity of the phrase, and, indeed, the whole point of view was one entirely foreign to him.

"I don't feel like that, myself," he said, drawing back, a little disgusted. "I hope my father will live for many years yet. And I'm sure Mr. Solomons has always been very good to you."

Mr. Lionel's face broke into a genial smile. "Come, come," he said frankly, "none of that humbug, you know. We're alone, and I ain't going to peach on you to the worthy governor. Don't go trying to talk any nonsense to me, for it don't go down. You *must* want to succeed to your title, naturally."

Paul hardly even liked to continue the discussion, his companion's tone was so distasteful to him; but he felt obliged upon to dissent.

"You're mistaken," he said curdly. "I'm not talking humbug. My father is extremely near and dear to me. And as to the baronetcy, I hate the very idea of it. Had it rested from the first outset with me to take it or leave it, I don't think I'd ever so much as have even claimed it."

"Well, you *are* a rum chap!" Mr. Lionel interjected, much amused. "For my own part, you know, I'd give a thousand pounds down to have such prospects as you have. And it won't be so long before you come into them, either. The old man drove me up to my uncle's the last time I was at Hillborough, and I thought he was looking precious shaky. Old age, as the preacher said, with rapid strides is creeping upon him. I only wish my own respected uncle was one-half as near popping off the hooks as he is. But that's the worst of my old boy. He's a tough sort, he is: belongs to the kind that goes on living for ever. The doctors say there's something the matter with his heart, to be sure, and that he mustn't excite himself. But, bless your soul! the stingy old beggar's too cunning to excite himself. He'll live till he's ninety, I verily believe, just on purpose to stick to his tin and spite me. And I, who'd make so much a better use of the money than he does—I'll be turned sixty, I expect, before ever I come into it."

Paul was too disgusted even to answer. His own obligations to Mr. Solomons, if any, were far less in every way than Mr. Lionel's; but he couldn't have endured so to speak or think of any man to whom he owed the very slightest gratitude.

They went on into the Park with more or less of conversation, and strolled up and down the Row for some time, Mr. Lionel, with a flower gaily stuck in button-hole and a cane poised gracefully in his lemon-gloved hand, staring hard into the face of every girl he passed, and Paul half regretting in his own soul he had consented to come out before the eyes of the town in such uncongenial company. At last, as they neared the thronged corner of Hyde Park Gate, Paul was roused from a reverie into which he had momentarily fallen, by hearing a familiar voice at his side fall musically on his ear, exclaiming, with an almost imperceptible foreign accent, "What! you here, Mr. Gascoyne? How charming! How delightful!"

The heir to the baronetcy turned quickly round, and beheld on a chair in the well-dressed crowd the perennial charms of little Madame Ceriolo.

She looked younger and prettier even than she looked at Mentone. Madame Ceriolo made a point, in fact, of looking always her youngest and prettiest in London—for hers was the beauty which is well under the control of its skilful possessor. To be pretty in London may pay any day. A great city encloses such endless possibilities. And, indeed, there, among the crowd of unknown faces, where he felt acutely all the friendless loneliness of the stranger in the vast Metropolis, Paul was really quite pleased to see the features of the good-humoured little adventuress. He shook hands with her warmly in the innocence of his heart, and stopped a moment to exchange reminiscences. Madame Ceriolo's face lighted up at once (through the pearl powder) with genuine pleasure. This was business indeed. She saw she had made a momentary conquest of Paul, and she tried her best to follow it up, in order, if possible, to ensure its permanence. For a British baronet, mark you, is never to be despised, above all by those who have special need of a guarantee passport to polite Society.

"So I have to congratulate you," she said archly, *humming* on him through her glasses, "upon securing the little American heiress. Ah, you thought I didn't know; but a little bird told me. And, to tell you the truth, I felt sure of it myself the moment I saw you with her on the hills at Mentone."

Paul, glancing round with burning cheeks, would have given anything that minute to sink into the ground. There, before the face of assembled London! and the people on all the neighbouring chairs just craning their necks to catch the smallest fragments of their conversation.

"I—I don't quite understand," he stammered out nervously.

"Oh, yes," Madame Ceriolo went on, as cool as a cucumber and still smiling benignly. "She'd made up her mind to be Lady Gascoyne, I know, or to perish in the attempt; and now, we hear, she's really succeeded."

As she spoke, Madame Ceriolo cast furtive eyes to right and left to see whether all her neighbours duly observed the fact that she was talking to a prospective man of title. At that open acknowledgment of Paul's supposed exalted place in the world, the necks of the audience craned still more violently. A young man of rank, then, in the open marriage market believed to have secured a wealthy American lady!

"You're mistaken," Paul answered, speaking rather low and trembling with mortification. "I am *not* engaged to Miss Boyton at all." Then he hesitated for a second, and after a brief pause, in spite of Mr. Lionel's presence (as witness for Mr. Solomons to so barefaced a dereliction of duty), he added the further incriminating clause, "And I don't mean to be."

The interest of the bystanders reached its highest pitch. It was as good as a paragraph in a Society paper. The young man of title disclaimed the hand of the American heiress!

"But Mr. Armitage told me so," Madame Ceriolo retorted, with womanly persistence.

"Mr. Armitage is hardly likely to be as well informed on the point as I am myself," Paul answered, flushing red.

"Why, it was Miss Boyton herself who assured him of the fact," Madame Ceriolo went on, triumphant. "And I suppose Miss Boyton ought at least to know about her own engagement?"

"You're mistaken," Paul answered, lifting his hat curtly and moving off at once to cut short the painful colloquy. And the bystanders, whispering low behind their hands and fans to one another, opined there would soon be a sensation for Society in the shape of another aristocratic breach-of-promise case.

As they mingled in the crowd once more, Mr. Lionel, turning to his companion, exclaimed with very marked approbation, "That's a devilish fine woman, anyhow, Gascoyne. Who the dickens is she?"

Paul explained in a few words what little he knew about Madame Ceriolo's position and antecedents.

"I like that woman," Mr. Lionel went on, with the air of a connoisseur in female beauty. "She's got fine eyes, by Jove! and I'm death on eyes. And then her complexion! Why didn't you introduce me? I should like to cultivate her."

"I'll introduce you if we pass her again," Paul answered, preoccupied. He was wondering in his own mind what Mr. Lionel would think of this awful resolution of his about the American heiress.

For the moment, however, Mr. Lionel, intent on his own thoughts, was wholly absorbed in his private admiration of Madame Ceriolo's well-developed charms.

"As fine-looking a young woman as I've seen for a fortnight," he went on meditatively. "And did you notice, too, how very hard she looked at me?"

"No, I didn't," Paul answered, just stifling a faint smile of contempt; "but, to tell you the truth, I think she'd look hard at anybody upon earth who looked hard at her. And she's scarcely young. She's not far off forty, if anything, I fancy." (At twenty-two, as we all know, forty seems quite mediæval.)

"Let's go back and pass her again," Lionel exclaimed, with effusion, turning round once more.

Paul shrank from the ordeal of facing those craning bystanders a second time; but he hadn't the courage to say *No* to his impetuous companion. Mr. Lionel's enthusiasm was too torrential to withstand. So they threaded their way back among the crowd of loungers.

Fortunately, by this time Madame Ceriolo had risen from her seat, after taking her full pennyworth, and was walking briskly and youthfully towards them. She met them once more—not quite undesignedly, either—with a sweet smile of welcome on those cherry-red lips of hers. (You buy the stuff for ten sous a stick at any coiffeur's in the Palais Royal.)

"My friend was anxious to make your acquaintance," Paul said, introducing him. "Mr. Lionel Solomons—Madame Ceriolo."

"Not a son of Sir Saul Solomons?" Madame Ceriolo exclaimed, inventing the existence of that eponymous hero on the spot with ready cleverness to flatter her new acquaintance's obvious snobbery.

"No, not a son," Mr. Lionel answered, airily, rising to the fly at once; "but we belong, I believe, to the same family." Which, if Sir Saul Solomons had possessed any objective reality at all, would, no doubt, in a certain broad sense, have been about as true as most other such claims to distinguished relationship.

Madame Ceriolo measured her man accurately on the spot.

"Ah, that dear Sir Saul," she said, with a gentle sigh. "He was so good, so clever; I was always so fond of him. And you're like him, too! The same profile! The same features! The same dark eyes and large, full-browed forehead!"

This was doubtless, also, in an ethnical sense, strictly correct; for Mr. Lionel's personal characteristics were simply those of the ancient and respected race to whom he owed his existence, and of which, apparently, the hypothetical Sir Saul was likewise a bright and shining example.

"May we walk your way?" Mr. Lionel said, gallantly ogling his fair companion.

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amiable. She accorded that permission with her most marked amiability.

They walked and talked for half an hour in the Park. Then Paul got tired of his subordinate part, and strolled off by himself obligingly. Mr. Lionel waited, and had ten minutes alone with his new-found charmer.

"Then I may really come and call upon you?" he asked at last, in a melting tone, as he grasped her hand—somewhat hard—at parting.

Madame Ceriolo's eyes darted a glance into his that might have intoxicated a far stronger man than Lionel Solomons.

"There's my card," she said, with a gracious smile, producing the famous pasteboard with the countess's coronet stamped on it in relief. "A humble hotel—but I like it myself, because it reminds me of my beloved Tyrol. Whenever you like, Mr. Solomons, you may drop in to see me. Any relation of that admirable Sir Saul, I need hardly say, is always welcome."

Mr. Lionel went home to his rooms in Pimlico that afternoon half an inch taller—which would make him fully five feet six in his high-heeled walking shoes on a modest computation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WILES OF THE STRANGE WOMAN.

"ZÉBIE," Madame Ceriolo cried in a shrill voice to the maid-in-waiting, "*je ne reçois pas aujourd'hui, entendez-tu, imbécile!*"

Mademoiselle Eusébie, more shortly known to her intimates as Zébie, was the *fille de chambre* and general upstairs factotum of the *Hôtel de l'Univers*, in Clandon Street, Soho. Madame Ceriolo preferred that modest hostelry to the more usual plan of West-end lodgings; partly, to be sure, because it helped to keep up the fiction of her noble birth and Tyrolese ancestry, but partly also because it lent itself more readily to practical Bohemianism than do the straitlaced apartments of Notting Hill or Bayswater. In Clandon Street, Soho, one can live as one chooses, no man hindering; and Madame Ceriolo chose to live *à la Zingari*. "*On y est si bien*," she said, with a delicate shrug of those shapely shoulders, to her respectable acquaintances when she was doing propriety; "and, besides, the landlord, you know, is one of my poor compatriots. I take such an interest in his wife and children, in this foggy London, so far from the fresh breeze of our beloved mountains." For Madame Ceriolo was strong on the point of sensibility, and sighed (in public) for her native pine-clad valleys.

"And if Mr. Armitage calls?" Zébie asked inquiringly. "I am not to deny Madame, I suppose, at least to Mr. Armitage?"

"Zébie," Madame Ceriolo exclaimed, looking up at her sharply, "*tu es d'une inconvenance*—

mais d'une inconvenance!" Madame paused and reflected. "Well, no," she went on, after a brief mental calculation, "I'm not at home, even to Mr. Armitage."

"Tiens," Zébie answered; "*c'est drôle. Et cependant*—"

"Wait," Madame Ceriolo continued, reflecting profoundly. "There is yet one thing. If an ugly little Jew calls"—and Madame swept her finger rapidly through the air in burlesque representation of Mr. Lionel's well-marked profile—"nose so, lips so, curly hair, bulging forehead, odour of hair-oil—gives his name, I fancy, as Mr. Lionel Solomons—"

"Well, Madame?" Zébie repeated dutifully, with her hand on the door-edge.

"If he calls," Madame went on, gathering her robe around her, "you may tell him I'm indisposed—a slight indisposition—and will see nobody. But say to him, after awhile, with ever so little hesitation, you'll take up his card and inquire if I can receive him. And, then, you may show him meanwhile into the salon. That'll give me time, of course, to change my *peignoir*."

It was four o'clock gone, in the afternoon, a few days later than their meeting in the Park; and Madame, who had been up late at a little supper the evening before, was still in the intimacy of dressing-gown and curl-papers.

"*Parfaitement, Madame*," Zébie responded cheerfully, in the tone of one well accustomed to receiving such delicate orders, and left the room; while Madame lounged back on the sofa of her little sitting-room, and glanced lazily over the *feuilleton* of the previous day's *Figaro*.

The hotel was of the usual London-French type—a dingy, uncomfutable, dead-alive little place—mean and dear, yet Madame liked it. She could receive her callers and smoke her cigarettes here without attracting attention. She was rolling a bit of rice-paper, in fact, with practised skill between those dainty plump fingers ten minutes later, when Zébie reappeared at the door once more, with a card in her hand and a smile on her saucy Parisian features.

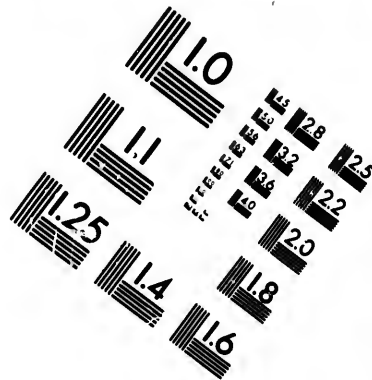
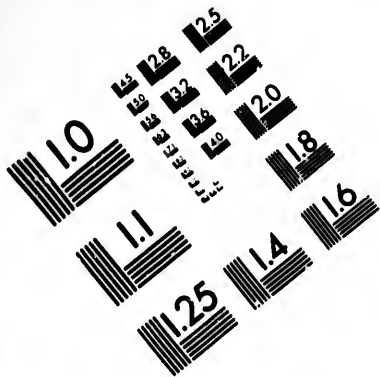
"The Monsieur Madame expected," she said: "he attends you in the salon."

Madame jumped up and roused herself at once. "My blue gown, Zébie," she cried. "No, not that, stupid! Yes, that's the one, with the pleats in front. Now, just give me time to slip myself into it, and to comb out my fringe, and touch up my cheeks a bit, and then you may bring the *gamin* up to me. Poor little imbecile! Tell him I'm in bed and meant to receive nobody—but hearing it was him, in spite of my *migraine*, I decided to make an effort and raise myself."

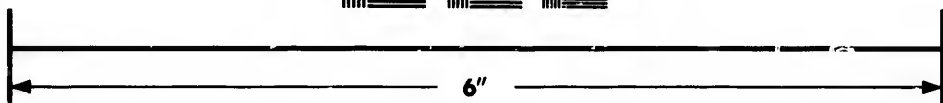
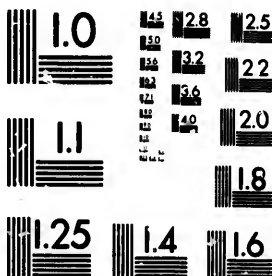
"*Parfaitement, Madame*," Zébie echoed once more, with ready acquiescence, and disappeared down the stairs to deliver her message.

"So it's you, Mr. Solomons," Madame cried,





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looking up from the sofa, where she lay in her shawls and her becoming tea-gown, with a hasty lace-wrap flung coquettishly round her pearl-white neck, as Mr. Lionel entered. "How very good of you to come and look me up so soon! Now admit, Monsieur, that I'm not ungrateful. I was ill in bed when my maid brought me up your card just now, and for nobody else in the world would I have thought of stirring myself. But when I heard it was *you*"—she gave him a killing glance from beneath those pencilled lashes—"I said to Eusébie, 'Just hand me the very first dress you come across in my wardrobe, and tell the gentleman I'll see him directly.' And so up I got, and here I am; and now I'm sure you'll excuse my lighting a wee little cigarette, just a cigarette of my own rolling, because I've made my poor fluttering heart beat so with the exertion."

Mr. Lionel would have excused a hundred cigarettes, so enchanted was he with this gracious reception. In fact, he admitted to a weakness for the fragrant Latakia himself, and in two minutes more he was actually inhaling the breath of one, deftly manufactured for his special use by Madame Ceriolo's own cunning fingers.

Madame Ceriolo twisted him as she twisted the cigarettes. He sat there, intoxicated with her charms, for more than an hour, in the course of which time the little woman, by dexterous side-pressure, had pumped him of all he knew or thought, far more effectually than even Armitage himself could have done it. She handled him gingerly with infinite skill.

"No, you're not in *the City*!" she exclaimed once, with well-assumed surprise, when Mr. Lionel happened incidentally to allude to the nature of his own accustomed pursuits. "You're trying to take me in. You don't mean to tell me you're really in *the City*!"

"Why not?" Mr. Lionel asked, with a flush of pride.

"Oh, you're not in the very least like a *City* man," Madame Ceriolo replied, looking up at him archly. "Why, I thought from your manners you were one of the people who pass their lives dawdling between their club and the Row. I never should have believed you could possibly be in the *City*. What is your club, by the way?" she added with an afterthought, "in case I should ever want to write to you."

Mr. Lionel's lips trembled with pleasure.

"I'm down for the 'Garrick,'" he said (which was, in point of fact, an inexact remark); "but until I get in there, you know—it's such a long job, nowadays—I hang out for the present at the 'Junior Financial.' It's a small place in Duke Street, St. James's. If ever you should do me the honour to write to me, though, I think you'd better write to my chambers in Pimlico."

He called them "chambers" instead of

lodgings because it sounded more swell and rakish. And he produced a card with his name and address on it.

Madame Ceriolo placed it with marked care in an inner compartment of her pretty little tortoise-shell purse—the purse with the coronet and initials on the case, which had been given her in Paris by—well, never mind those forgotten little episodes.

"And so you live with Mr. Gascoyne!" she said, noting the address. "Dear Mr. Gascoyne! so quaint, so original! Though we all laughed at him, we all liked him. He was the life and soul of our party at Mentone."

"Well, I live with him only because I find it convenient," Mr. Lionel interposed. "He's not exactly the sort of chap I should take to naturally."

Madame Ceriolo caught at her cue at once.

"I should think not," she echoed. "A deal too slow for *you*, one can see that at a glance. A very good fellow in his way, of course; but oh my! so straitlaced, so absurdly puritanical."

And she laughed melodiously.

"And how about the American heiress you spoke of in the Park?" Mr. Lionel inquired, with professional eagerness.

"Oh, that was all chaff," Madame Ceriolo answered, after an imperceptible pause, to gain time for her invention. She was a good-natured little swindler, after all, was Madame Ceriolo; and from the way he asked it, she jumped to the conclusion he wanted the information for no friendly purpose, so she withheld it sternly. Why should she want to do a bad turn to the poor little scallywag?

So the conversation glided off upon Paul, his Quixotic ideas and his moral absurdities; and before it had ended, the simple-minded young cynic, like clay in the hands of the easy-going but cunning adventurers, had told her all about Mr. Solomons and himself, and the plan for exploiting the British baronet, and the confounded time an uncle always contrived to live, and the difficulty of extracting blood from a stone, and the trials and troubles of the *genus* nephew in its endeavour to perform that arduous surgical operation. To all of which Madame Ceriolo, feeling her way with caution by tentative steps, had extended a ready and sympathetic ear, and had made a rapid mental note, "Bad heart, weak head, good material to work upon—fool, vain, impressionable, unscrupulous." Such men as that were Madame's stock-in-trade. She battered on their money, sucked them dry as fast as she could, and then left them.

Not that Madame was ever what British respectability in its exactest sense describes as disreputable. The wise adventurers knew a more excellent way than that. Never throw away the essentials of a good name. She traded entirely upon promises and expectations. Her method was to make a man head over ears in love, and then to delude him into

the fallacious belief that she meant to marry him. As soon as he was reduced to the flaccid condition, by constant draining, she retired gracefully. Some day, when she found a man rich enough and endurable enough, she intended to carry the programme of marriage into execution and end her days in the odour of respectability. But that was for the remote future, no doubt. Meanwhile, she was content to take what she could get by her drainage operations, and live her own Bohemian life untrammelled.

At last, most unwillingly, Mr. Lionel rose and took up his hat to go.

"I may come again soon?" he said interrogatively.

Madame's professional amiability never forgot her in similar circumstances.

"As often as you like," she answered, smiling a benign smile upon the captured victim; "I'm always glad to see nice people—except on Fridays," she added after a pause. Friday was the day when Armitage most often called, and she didn't wish to let her two principal visitors clash unnecessarily.

At the door Mr. Lionel pressed her hand with a tender squeeze. Madame Ceriolo returned the pressure with a demure and well-calculated diminution of intensity. It doesn't do to let them think they can make the running too fast or too easily. Draw them on by degrees and they stick the longer. Mr. Lionel gazed into those languid eyes of hers. Madame Ceriolo dropped the lids with most maidenly modesty.

"Don't mention to Mr. Gascoyne," she murmured, withdrawing her hand, which Lionel showed a tendency to hold too long, "that you've been here this afternoon, I beg of you as a favour."

"How curious!" her new admirer exclaimed with surprise. "Why, I was just going to ask you not to say anything to him for worlds about it."

"Sympathy," Madame Ceriolo murmured. "The common brain-wave. When people are cast in corresponding moulds, these curious things often happen pat, just so. *Figures-vous si je suis sympathique.*" And she took his hand once more, and let it drop suddenly; then she turned and fled, like a girl, to the sofa, as if half ashamed of her own unwise emotion.

Mr. Lionel went down the stairs in the seventh heaven. At last he had found a beautiful woman ready to admire him. She saw his good points and appreciated him at once at his full worth. Forty? What malevolent, ill-natured nonsense! Not a day more than twenty-seven, he'd be bound on affidavit. And, then, what mattered the disparity of age? Such grace, such knowledge of the world and Society, such noble birth, such a countess's coronet embroidered on her handkerchief!

"Zébie," Madame cried from her sofa in the

corner, as that well-trained domestic answered her double ring ("*sonnez deux fois pour la fille de chambre*") while Lionel's footfall still echoed on the stair, "if that little fool of a Jew calls again you can show him up straight off at any time. Do you understand, idiot? at any time—unless Mr. Armitage is here already."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BARONETCY IN THE BALANCE.

SUMMER and autumn Paul worked away, very much uphill at journalism in London, pushing his road ahead slowly but surely into steady occupation, and not only covering all his modest expenses, but even laying by a trifle at odd times towards wiping out those terrible claims of Mr. Solomons.

It was hard work and uphill work, undeniably. No matter how good a start a man may get in literature—and, thanks to indefatigable Mrs. Douglas, with her backstairs instinct, Paul's start had been an unusually easy one—the profession of letters must needs be an arduous craft for every beginner. The doors are crowded; the apprenticeship is long, toilsome, and ill-paid. Paul had to endure that painful fate, common to all of us who earn our bread by spinning material out of our own brains for public consumption, of seeing manuscript after manuscript "inclined with thanks," and of labouring for hours and hours together on that which, after all, profited nothing. Nevertheless, a certain proportion of his work was accepted and paid for; and that proportion brought him enough to pay for his half of the rooms he shared with his un congenial fellow-lodger, and to keep him in food, clothing, and washing. It was a great joy to him when he began to find his weekly receipts outbalance expenditure, and to lay by, were it only a few shillings at a time, towards the final extinguishment of his debt to Mr. Solomons.

Had it been the National Debt of England that he had to wipe out, it could not have seemed to him at the time much more hopeless of accomplishment. But still he toiled on, determined at least to do his best by it—with Nes in the background watching over him from a distance.

Summer and autumn passed away, and at Christmas, when Faith was freed once more from the tyranny of the infants, and business was slack in London offices, he determined to run down for a week or two's rest and change to Hillborough. But he must pay for his board and lodging, he told his mother; he was a free man now, earning his own livelihood, and he must no longer be a burden to his family in any way. With many remonstrances, he was at last allowed to have his wish, and to contribute the modest sum of fifteen shillings a

week, in return for his keep, to the domestic exchequer.

He had only been home one day, when Faith took him for their favourite walk on the Knoll, and confided to him all her most recent family observations.

"Do you notice any difference in father, Paul?" she asked a little anxiously, as they walked along the springy turf of that long ridge, looking down upon the wide weald on a beautiful bright December morning.

Paul hesitated to answer.

"Well, Lionel Solomons said to me in the summer," he replied at last, after a long pause, "that he was getting shaky, and that made me nervous; so I've been watching him close yesterday and to-day, and, to tell you the truth, Faith, he isn't quite so strong on his legs as he used to be."

Faith's eyes filled with tears. To her and to Paul, it was nothing that their father's *h's* were weak or non-existent, and that their father's grammar was deficient in concord. They loved him as dearly as if he had been a lily-handed baronet of many broad acres, with courtly manners and an elegant drawl, but possessing no final *g's* to his name, and hardly a trace of the letter *r* to speak of. To say the truth they loved him even much better. They realised how hard he had worked all his days to keep them, and how, according to his light, feeble and flickering enough, he had tried to do the very best for them. He had always been a kind and indulgent father, and the bare thought of losing him was to Faith and to Paul a terrible source of coming trouble.

"His life's so hard," Faith murmured through her rising tears. "At his age he oughtn't to have to be driving about all day or all night in the rain and the cold. He isn't strong enough for it now—I'm sure he isn't, Paul—and it makes my heart bleed to see how he has to go and do it."

"The fact is," Paul answered, "a man in his position ought to have a son who can fill his place, and take the heaviest work at least off his shoulders. If dear father 'd done what he ought to have done with me, I really believe he'd have brought me up to his own trade, and to carry on the business now he isn't fit for it."

Faith's womanly soul revolted at the alternative. She was proud of Paul, her clever, well-educated Oxford brother, and she couldn't bear to think of him, even in fancy, degraded to the level of a mere common horsey hanger-on of stables.

"Oh, don't say that, Paul darling!" she cried, half aghast. "I wish dear father had somebody to help him and take his place, now he's old, of course; but not *you*, Paul—not *you*—oh, never, never! Don't talk of it, even. It seems such a perfect desecration."

"I'd come back now and help him," Paul answered stubbornly. "I'd come back and help him, even as it is, only I know the shock of it

would break his heart. He could never put up with the disappointment. I can manage a horse as well as anybody even now, and I wouldn't mind the work one bit—I hope I'm strong-minded enough not to be ashamed of my father's trade—but I'm sure he himself would never consent to it. He's brought me up to be a gentleman as well as he could, and he's fixed his heart on my being a credit to the title, whenever the miserable thing falls in to me; and if I were to turn back on it now and come home to help him, he'd feel it was a come-down from all his high hopes and ideals for my future, and he'd be a disappointed man henceforth and for ever."

"Oh, yes; and to think of the disgrace before all the county!" Faith added with a sigh. A woman must always see things mainly from the social point of view. "I should hate all the nasty rich people—the Hamiltons and the Boyd-Galloways and all that horrid lot—to go sniggering and chucking over it among themselves, as I know they would, and to say, 'So that fellow Gascoyne, after sending his son to Oxford and trying to make a gentleman of him, has had to come down from his high horse at last, and bring him back to Hillborough in the end to look after the stables!' The wretched sneering things! I know the nasty ways of them!"

"Father could never stand that," Paul answered reflectively.

"No, never," Faith replied. "Paul, don't you ever even speak of it to him."

But for the three weeks of his stay at Hillborough, Paul watched his father with close attention. The baronet cabman wasn't well, that was clear. He complained constantly of a dull pain in his side, and manifested an unwonted dislike to going out at nights whenever the sky was cold or frosty. "The wind seemed to ketch him," he said, "as it'd never ketched him in all his life afore, out Kent's Hill way specially, where it blew 'most hard enough to take a man off the box these bitter evenings. He didn't want no jobs out there by Kent's Hill this weather if he could help it."

New Year's week, however, was a busy week; there were parties and dances at many country houses, and Sir Emery's slate, hung up behind the door, was thick with orders. Paul was busy, too, with work for editors, which kept him close at his desk, writing for dear life the best part of the day, for journalism knows no such word as holiday. As much as Sir Emery would let him, however, Paul went out to the yard at odd moments to harness in the horses and do small ends of work whenever the hired man was off on a job; but that wasn't often, for Sir Emery fretted and fumed to see Paul so occupied, and Faith declared the worry it engendered in father's mind was almost worse for him, she believed, than the cold and exposure. Pulled two ways, in fact, by her double devotion, she conspired with

Paul to help her father, and then conspired with her father in turn to keep Paul, their own precious Paul, outside the stables at all hand.

The fourth of January was a bitter cold day. So cold a day had not been known for years at Hillborough. In the morning, Mr. Solomons met Sir Emery by chance at the station.

"Why, bless my soul, Gascoyne," he cried, with a start, "how ill you look, to be sure!" Then he made a mental note to himself that the premium on the noble baronet's life policy should have been paid yesterday, and that by all appearances settlement ought not to be delayed longer than to-morrow. You never know what a day may bring forth; and, indeed, if Mr. Solomons hadn't had an execution to put in that very morning at Shillingford, he would have rushed off there and then, with money in hand, to make sure of his insurance at the London office.

Instead of which he merely remarked in a casual tone, as he jumped into his train:

"My thermometer registered nine degrees of frost last night. Take care, Gascoyne, how you expose yourself this weather."

At ten o'clock that evening, as they sat round the fire, chatting family gossip in a group together, Sir Emery suddenly rose and looked at the clock.

"I must be going now," he said in a shuffling way. "'Arf-past ten was the hour Miss Boyd-Galloway told me."

Faith glanced up at him sharply with a pained look.

"Why, you're not going out again to-night, father?" she exclaimed in surprise. "There's nothing on the slate; I looked myself to see about it."

"Well, this 'ere was a verbal horder," Sir Emery answered, putting on his coat with evident difficulty and some marks of pain in his right side. "Miss Boyd-Galloway, she met me down in the 'igh Street this morning, and she told me I was to go out to Kent's 'ill to fetch her. Dinner, I expect, or else a small an' early. But I reckon it's dinner; it's 'most too soon to go to take up even for a children's or a Cinderella."

Paul glanced at Faith, and Faith glanced at Paul. Sir Emery had evidently omitted to note it on the slate on purpose. A rapid signalling went on between their eyes. "Dare I venture?" Paul's asked in mute pantomime of Faith's, and Faith's, with a droop of extreme reluctance, made answer dumbly: "I suppose you must. He's too ill to go; but oh, Paul, Paul, the disgrace and humiliation of it!"

The young man made up his mind at once and irrevocably.

"Father," he said, rising and fronting him as he stood, still struggling with his coat, "sit down where you are. I can't allow you to go up Kent's Hill to-night. You're not feeling well. I can see you're suffering. You're unfit

for work. You must let me go to take up Miss Boyd-Galloway instead of you."

Sir Emery burst into a sudden laugh of genuine amusement. His Paul to go cab-driving! It was too ridiculous. Then the laugh seemed to catch him violently in the side, and he subsided once more with a pained expression of face.

"Paul, my boy," he answered, sinking back into his chair to hide the twinge, "I wouldn't let you go—no, not for five hundred pounds down. You, as is a gentleman born and bred, and out there, afore the eyes of all 'illborough and Surrey!"

Faith looked at her mother with an imperious look.

"Father," she cried, seizing his arm convulsively in her grasp, "you know I hate it as much as you do. You know I can't bear for Paul to do it. But it must be done. It's a hard wrench, but you *must* let him go. I can see you're ill. Dear father, you ought to have told us before, and then perhaps we might have managed to get some other driver."

"There ain't no other driver nor other 'oss disengaged in all 'illborough to-night," her father answered confidently, shaking his head as he looked at her.

Once more Faith telegraphed with her eyes to Paul, and Paul telegraphed back to Faith.

"Father," he said, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder persuasively, "you *must* let me go. There's no other way out of it. I'll wrap myself up tight, and muffle my throat, if you like, so that nobody 'll notice me; and in the dark, at the door, they're not likely to look close. But go I *must*; of that I'm determined."

The father humoured him for a moment.

"Well, you can go, any way, and put in the 'osses," he answered reluctantly, for he hated his son to do anything at all about the stables and coach-house.

Paul went out and put them in at once with the confidence of old habituation. Then he left them standing alone in the yard while he ran upstairs to get his ulster and comforter.

"Wait a minute," he said, "I'll soon be down."

Faith went up with him to see that all was snug and warm.

"Mind you wrap up well, Paul," she cried, with her eyes dimmed sadly for the family disgrace. "It's a bitter cold night. If father was to go to Kent's Hill this evening, I'm sure it'd very nearly be the death of him."

In two minutes more they descended the stairs. At the door Faith stopped and kissed him convulsively. It was a hard wrench, but she knew they must do it. Then they went together into the little parlour. There their mother sat, looking very uncomfortable in her easy-chair. The larger one opposite, where Sir Emery usually took his ease by night, was now vacant. Faith glanced at Paul in mute inquiry.

"Where is he, mother?" Paul gasped out anxiously.

"E's gone, Paul," Mrs. Gascoyne answered with a sudden gulp. "The minute you was out o' the room, 'e whipped up his things, jumped up from 'is chair, and says to me in a hurry, 'Mother, I'm off,' says 'e, an' out he run in 'is overcoat as he stood, scrambled up on to the box, gave the 'osses the word, an' afore I could as much as say 'Emery, don't,' drove off up the road as 'ard as ever 'is 'ands could drive 'em."

Faith sank into the chair with a despairing look.

"It'll kill him," she cried sobbing. "Oh, Paul, it'll kill him!"

Paul did not wait or hesitate for a second.

"Where's he gone?" he cried. "To which house on the hill? I'll run after him, catch him up, and drive him back home, if only you know which house he's going to."

"He never told us," Faith gasped out, as white as death. "He only said he was going to Kent's Hill to fetch Miss Boyd-Galloway. There are so many big houses on the hill, and so many roads, and so many dinners just now. But perhaps the likeliest is Colonel Hamilton's, isn't it?"

Without another word Paul opened the door and darted up the street.

"I'll catch him yet," he cried, as he dashed round the corner of Plowden's Court. "Oh, mother, mother! you ought to have stopped him!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

TAKING it for granted his father had driven, as Faith suggested, to Colonel Hamilton's, Paul ran at full speed along the frosty high road in the direction of that end of the Kent's Hill hog's back. For the hill rears itself up as a great mass of narrow sandstone upland, extending for some three miles in a long straight line down the centre of the valley, and exposed to all the four winds of heaven impartially. Snow was beginning to fall now, and the road under-foot rang hard as iron. Paul ran on without stopping till he was out of breath. Then he halted awhile by the foot of the first slope, and climbed slowly on towards the lower platform.

Half-way up he met a returning cab, full of course, and therefore unwilling to wait and be questioned. But it was no time to stand on ceremony now. Paul knew his father's life was absolutely at stake. He called to it to halt. The driver recognised his voice and pulled up to a walk.

"Have you passed my father anywhere, going up the hill?" Paul inquired eagerly.

"Ow do I know?" the man answered in a very gruff tone, ill-pleased at the interruption. "I've passed a dozen or more of kebs and

kerridges goin' to fetch parties 'ere and there on the 'ill; but it's as dark as pitch, so 'oo's to know by magic 'co druv them?" And whistling to himself a dissatisfied whistle, he whipped up again and drove on, leaving Paul no wiser.

It's a very long way from Hillborough to Kent's Hill, five miles at least by the shortest road; and long before Paul had reached the top his heart began to sink within him as he saw how impossible it was for him to overtake his father. Nevertheless, he persisted, out of pure stubborn doggedness and perseverance; he would go at least to the house and let him know he was there. And, if possible, he would persuade him to remain under shelter at some neighbouring cottage till the next morning.

But, oh! the long, weary way up those frozen hills, all in the dark, with the snow falling fast in the road, and the bitter cold wind beating hard all the time against his face as he fronted it. It was cold for Paul even as he walked and faced it—cold, in spite of the exertion of mounting. How infinitely colder, then, it must be for his father, sitting still on the box, with that dull pain growing deeper every minute in his side, and the chill wind whistling round the corners of the carriage!

On, and on, and on, through the soft snow he trudged, with his heart sinking lower at every step, and his feet and hands growing colder and colder. Of all the hills in England Kent's Hill is the most interminable. Time after time you think you are at the top, and time after time, just as you reach the apparent summit, you see yet another slope opening out with delusive finality in front of you. But at last Paul reached the end of those five long miles and those nine hundred feet of sheer ascent, and turned with wearied and aching limbs under the gateway of Colonel Hamilton's garden. At the door he saw at once he had come in vain. There was certainly no party at the Colonel's to-night. Not a carriage at the door; not a sign of life. It was close on eleven now, but emboldened by necessity, he rang the bell. After some minutes his ring was answered by a supercilious footman in incomplete costume.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," Paul gasped, "but can you tell me, please, whereabouts on the Hill there's a party to-night?"

The supercilious footman eyed him askance with profound astonishment.

"Young man," he said severely, "do you mean to say you've rung me up this time of night from my own bedroom, for nothink else but just to ask me where there's a party on the 'ill? There's parties on the 'ill everywhere this evening." And without waiting for Paul to explain himself further he slammed the door in his face with uncompromising rudeness.

Paul turned from the porch, too much distressed on his father's account even to notice

the personal insult, and made his way through the snow, along uncertain paths, to the very top of the ridge, where he could see on either hand over the whole surrounding country, and just at what house the lights burned brightest. Lady Mary Webster's seemed most thronged of any, and Miss Boyd-Galloway was intimate with Lady Mary. So thither Paul plodded along by the top of the ridge, descending through the grounds, reckless of fences or proprietary rights, till he stood in front of the crowded carriage-drive. Coachmen were there, half a dozen or more, walking up and down in the snow and beating their chests with their arms to keep themselves warm, while their weary horses stood patiently by, the snow melting as it fell on their flanks and faces.

It was no night for any man to keep another waiting.

"Ere's Gascoyne's son!" one of the cabmen cried, as he came up, for they were mostly cabmen, nobody caring to risk their own horses' lives abroad in such slippery weather; since rich men, indeed, take more heed of horseflesh than their fellow-Christians.

"Why, what do you want, Mr. Paul?" another of them asked, half touching his hat in a kind of undecided salute to the half-made gentleman; for they all knew that Gascoyne's son had been to Oxford College, and would develop in time into a real recognised baronet, with his name in the peerage.

"Is my father here, or has he been here?" Paul cried out breathless. "He went out to-night when he wasn't fit to go, and I've come up to see if he's got here safe, or if I could do anything in any way to help him."

The first speaker shook his head with a very decided negative.

"No, 'e ain't been 'ere," he answered. "'E 'aven't no job. Leastways, none of us ain't a-seen 'im anywhere."

A terrible idea flashed across Paul's mind. Could his father have started and fallen on the way? Too agitated to care what might happen to himself again, he rang the bell, and asked the servant boldly, "Is Miss Boyd-Galloway here? or has she been here this evening?"

"No, sir," the servant answered: he was a stranger in the land, and judged Paul rightly by his appearance and accent. "Miss Boyd-Galloway's not been here at all. I don't think, in fact, my lady expected her."

"Will you go in and ask if anybody knows where Miss Goyd-Galloway's spending the evening?" Paul cried, in his agony. "Tell them it's a matter of life and death. I want to know where to find Miss Boyd-Galloway."

In a few minutes more the servant returned, bringing along with him young Mr. Webster, the son of the house, in person. "Oh, it's you, is it, Gascoyne?" the young man said, eyeing him somewhat astonished. "Why, what on earth do you want with Miss Boyd-Galloway this evening?"

"My father's gone to fetch her," Paul

gasped out, in despair; "he's very ill to-night, and oughtn't to have ventured out, and I've come to see whether I can overtake him."

Young Mr. Webster was kind-hearted in his way. "I'm sorry for that," he said, good-naturedly; "but I'm glad it's nothing the matter with Miss Boyd-Galloway herself, anyhow. Lady Mary was in quite a state of mind just now when she got your message. I must run in at once and reassure her. But won't you step inside and have a glass of wine before you go off yourself? You don't look well, and it's a freezing cold night. Here, Roberts, a glass of wine for Mr. Gascoyne in the hall. Now, will you?"

"I won't take any wine, thanks," Paul answered, hurriedly, declining the proffered hospitality on more grounds than one. "But you haven't told me if you know where Miss Boyd-Galloway's spending the evening. I must find out, to go to my father." He spoke so anxiously that there was no mistaking the serious importance of his errand.

"Oh, I'll go and inquire," young Webster answered, carelessly; and he went back at once with his lounging step to the bright warm drawing-room.

"Who is it?" Lady Mary exclaimed, coming forward, eagerly. "Don't tell me anything dreadful has happened to dear Isabel!"

"Oh, it's nothing at all," young Webster answered, laughing outright at her fears. "It's only that young Gascoyne from Hillborough wants to know at once where Isabel's dining."

"That young Gascoyne!" Lady Mary cried, aghast. "Not the young man they sent up to Oxford, I hope! Why, what on earth can he want, my dear Bertie, with Isabel?"

"He doesn't want Isabel," the young man answered, with an amused smile. "It seems his father's gone somewhere to fetch her, and he thinks the old man's too ill to be out, and he's come up on foot all the way to look after him."

"Very proper of him to help his father, of course," Lady Mary assented, with a stiff acquiescence, perceiving in this act a due appreciation of the duty of the poor to their parents, as set forth in the Church Catechism; "but he ought surely to know better than to come and disturb us about such a subject. He might have rung and inquired of Roberts."

"So he did," her son answered, with masculine common-sense. "But Roberts couldn't tell him, so he very naturally asked for me; and the simple question now is this—where's Isabel?"

"She's dining at the Dean's," Lady Mary replied, coldly; "but don't you go and tell him so yourself for worlds, Bertie. Let Roberts take out the message to the young person." For Lady Mary was a stickler in her way for the due subordination of the classes of Society.

Before the words were well out of her ladyship's mouth, however, her son had made his way into the hall once more, unheeding the prohibition, and conveyed to Paul the information he wanted as to Miss Boyd-Galloway's present whereabouts.

The message left Paul more hopelessly out of his bearings than ever. The fact was, he had come the wrong way. The Dean's was at the exact opposite end of Kent's Hill, three miles from the Websters' as the crow flies, by a trackless route among gorse and heather. There was no chance now left of overtaking his father before he drove from the house. All Paul could possibly do was to follow in his steps and hear what tidings he could of him from those who had seen him.

Away he trudged with trembling feet, along the crest of the ridge, stumbling from time to time over bushes half hidden by the newly-fallen snow, and with the keen air cutting against his face like a knife as he breasted it. It was indeed an awful night—awful even down in the snug valley at Hillborough, but almost Arctic in the intensity of its bitter cold on those bleak, wind-swept uplands. They say Kent's Hill is the chilliest spot in winter in all Southern England; as Paul pushed his way across the long bare summit that January evening, he trembled in his heart for the effect upon his father. It was slow work indeed to cover the three miles that lay between him and the Dean's, even disregarding as he was of the frequent notice-boards which threatened the utmost rigour of the law with churlish plainness of speech to inoffensive trespassers. More than once he missed his way in the blinding snow, and found himself face to face with the steeply-scarped southern bank, or with some wall or hedge on the slope to northward. But at last, pushing on in spite of all difficulties, he reached the garden at the Dean's, and stood alone within the snow-covered gateway. There, all was still once more; the party had melted away, for it was now nearly midnight. But a light still burned feebly in one of the upper rooms. In his eagerness and anxiety Paul could not brook delay; he ventured here again to ring the bell. A servant put out his head slowly and inquiringly from the half-opened window.

"Was Miss Boyd-Galloway dining here tonight?" Paul asked, with a sinking heart, of the sleepy servant.

"Yes," the man answered; "but she's gone half an hour ago."

"Who drove her home, or did she drive home at all?" Paul inquired once more.

"How should I know?" the servant replied, withdrawing his head testily. "Do you think I take down their numbers as they pass, like the bobby at the station? She ain't here, that's all. Ask me another one."

And he slammed the casement, leaving Paul alone on the snow-covered gravel-walk.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE CALL OF DUTY.

MEANWHILE, Sir Emery Gascoyne, Baronet, had been faithfully carrying out the duties of his station. He had promised to go and fetch Miss Boyd-Galloway at the Dean's, and come snow or rain or hail or frost, with perfect fidelity he had gone to fetch her.

His fatherly pride would never have allowed him to let Paul—his gentleman son—take his place on the box even for a single evening. Better by far meet his fate than that. To die was a thousand times easier than disgrace. So, as soon as Paul was out of sight upstairs, he had risen from his seat, seized his whip from the rack, and, in spite of that catching pain deep down in his side, driven off hastily before Paul could intercept him.

The drive to the Hill—by the west road to the further end, while Paul had followed by the shorter and steeper eastern route—was a bitter cold one: and the horses, though roughed that day, had stumbled many times on the frozen slopes, having stern work indeed to drag the heavy cab up that endless zigzag. As Sir Emery drove, the pain in his side grew duller and deeper: and though he was too unskilled in diagnosis to know it for pleurisy, as it really was, he felt himself it was blowing up hard for a serious illness. But, accustomed as he had long been to exposure in all weathers, he made light of the discomfort, and drove bravely along to the Dean's doorway.

It was half-past ten by Sir Emery's watch—the necessary business silver watch of the country cabman—when he reached the house; but though he sent in word that he was there and ready, his fare was in no great hurry, as it seemed, to present herself.

"Miss Boyd-Galloway's carriage," the footman announced; but Miss Boyd-Galloway, immersed in her game of whist, only nodded in reply, and went on playing out the end of the rubber in dignified silence. She was a lady who loved the rigour of the game. It was comfortably warm in that snug country-house; and who thinks of the cabman outside in the cold there?

The other coachmen walked up and down, and slapped their chests, and exhorted their horses. But Sir Emery sat motionless and chilled on the box, not daring to dismount, lest when once down he should be unable to get up again. The butler, a good-natured soul who had known him for years, offered him a glass of whisky-and-water to keep him warm. But Sir Emery shook his head in dissent: it would only make him colder if he had to sit long on the box in the snow there.

"Gascoyne's off his feed," another cabman remarked, with a cheerful nod; and the rest laughed.

But Sir Emery didn't laugh. He sat stark and stiff, breathing every moment with increasing difficulty, on his seat by the porch, under shelter of the yew-tree.

For half an hour or more he waited in the cold. One after another, the guests dropped out and drove away piece-meal; but not Miss Boyd-Galloway. He trembled and shivered and grew numb within. Yet wait he must; there was absolutely no help for it. Colder and colder he grew, till he seemed all ice. His father's heart was broken within him. More than once in his miserable faintness he half wished to himself he had allowed Paul, after all, just this one night to relieve him.

At last the door opened for the tenth time, and "Miss Boyd-Galloway's carriage" was duly summoned.

There was a moment's pause. Sir Emery was almost too numbed to move. Then slowly, with an effort, he turned his horses, and, wheeling round in a circle, brought them up to the doorway.

"What do you mean by keeping us waiting here in the cold like this?" Miss Boyd-Galloway asked in a sharp, rasping voice. She was a sour-looking lady of a certain age, and losing the rubber never improved her temper.

Sir Emery answered nothing. He was too well accustomed to the ways of the trade even to reflect to himself in his own silent soul that Miss Boyd-Galloway had kept *him* waiting in the cold—and in far worse cold—for considerably more than half an hour.

The footman stood forward and opened the door. Miss Boyd-Galloway and her friend, wrapped in endless rugs over their square-cut dresses, stepped inside and seated themselves.

"Home!" Miss Boyd-Galloway called out with an authoritative voice. There was another pause. Miss Boyd-Galloway put out her head to see the reason. "Home, I said, Gascoyne," she repeated angrily. "Didn't you hear me speak? Why, what are you waiting for?"

Sir Emery raised his whip with an evident effort.

"I'm a-goin', miss," he answered, and his voice was thick. "But it's a main cold night, and the road's 'eavy, and the 'osses is tired."

"Good gracious, what impertinence!" Miss Boyd-Galloway observed, withdrawing her head and shivering audibly. "It's my belief, Louisa, that man's been drinking."

"He certainly didn't seem able to move on the box," her companion retorted; "I noticed his manner."

"Oh, he's drunk," Miss Boyd-Galloway answered, with prompt decisiveness. "Dead drunk, I'm certain. Just see how he's driving. He hasn't even got sense enough left to guide his horses, and it runs in the blood, you know; they're a precious bad lot all through, these Gascoynes! To think that a man should have come down to this, whose ancestors were gentlemen born and bred and real Welsh baronets! A common cab-driver, and drunk at that! And the daughter's just as bad—that horrid girl at the National School

at Hillborough. A proud, discontented, impertinent hussy! Why, she won't even say 'miss' to my face when she speaks to me."

"Phew, what a jolt!" the other lady exclaimed, seizing Miss Boyd-Galloway's arm as the cab tipped up over a rut in the roadway.

"Druunk! quite drunk!" Miss Boyd-Galloway repeated with a meditative air, now confirmed in her opinion. "I only hope to goodness he won't upset us in the snow—it's awfully drifted—anywhere here by the roadside."

And, indeed, to do the fare full justice, there seemed good reason that particular evening to blame Sir Emery Gascoyne's driving. As a rule, the baronet was a careful and cautious whip, little given to wild or reckless coachmanship, and inclined to be sparing, both by inclination and policy, of his valuable horseflesh. But to-night he seemed to let the horses wander at their own sweet will, from side to side, hardly guiding them at all through the snow and the crossings. At times they swerved dangerously close to the off-hedge; at others they almost neared the edge of the slope that led down the zig-zag.

"We shall never get out of this alive," Miss Boyd-Galloway remarked, leaning back philosophically; "but if we do, Louisa, I shall certainly get Gascoyne's license taken away, or have him well fined at Uncle Edward's petty sessions for reckless driving."

At the corner by the larches the horses turned sharp into the main road. They turned so abruptly that they almost upset the cab and its precious freight. Miss Boyd-Galloway's patient soul could stand it no longer. In spite of the cold air and the driving snow, she opened the window wide, pushed out her woollen-enveloped head, and expostulated vigorously: "If you don't take more care, Gascoyne, I shall have you fined. You're endangering our lives. You've been drinking, I'm sure. Pull yourself together, man, and drive carefully now, or else we'll get out and walk, and then report you."

Sir Emery essayed an inarticulate answer. But his breath was feeble, and the words stuck in his throat. Miss Boyd-Galloway withdrew her indignant head more angry than ever.

"He's absolutely stupid and dumb with drink," she said, musing with positive pleasure over the cabman's delinquencies. "He can't get out a word. He's too drunk to sit straight. It'll be a mercy if we all get back alive. But I'm morally confident we won't, so make up your mind for the worst, Louisa."

Near the entrance to the town, Miss Boyd-Galloway didn't notice through the dimmed window-panes that their coachman was taking them in the wrong direction. Or, rather, to speak more accurately, the horses, now left to their own devices, were returning at their own pace to their familiar stable.

They plodded along slowly, slowly now, for

the snow on the ground grew ever deeper and deeper. Their gait was reduced to a shambling walk, with occasional interludes of stumbling and slipping. Miss Boyd-Galloway's wrath waxed deep and still. She didn't remonstrate any longer; she felt sure in her own heart Gascoyne had got beyond all that long since: she meditated "fourteen days without the option of a fine" as the very slightest punishment Uncle Edward could in reason award him.

Finally, and suddenly, a jerk, a halt. They turned unexpectedly down a narrow side-entrance. Miss Boyd-Galloway was aware of a courtlike shadow. Houses rose sheer around her on every side. Surely, surely, this was not the Priory, not the paternal mansion! Miss Boyd-Galloway put out her head and looked about her once more.

"Oh, Louisa, Louisa, what on earth are we to do?" she cried in impotent despair. "The man's so drunk that, instead of taking us home, he's allowed the horses to come back to their own stables!"

"I shall get out this minute and walk!" her friend ejaculated sleepily.

They got out and stood by the side of the cab.

"Now, Gascoyne," Miss Boyd-Galloway began in a very shrill tone, "this is really too bad. You're asleep on the box, sir. Wake up, I say; wake up now, will you?"

But Sir Emery sat stiff and stark in his place, and never heeded even the admonition of Miss Boyd-Galloway's stout umbrella poked hard against his side in practical remonstrance.

As they stood there, wondering, the back door of the house was flung open wide, and Faith Gascoyne, with her head uncovered, rushed hastily out into the dark, cold courtyard. She took no notice of the two ladies who stood there, shivering, in their wraps and shawls, on the snow-clad stones, but darted wildly forward towards the figure on the box.

"Father, father!" she cried in an agonized voice, "are you all right, darling?"

"No, he's not all right," Miss Boyd-Galloway answered testily, retreating towards the passage. "He's anything but right, and you ought to be ashamed of him. He's as drunk as an owl, and he's brought us back here to his own place, instead of taking us home as he ought to the Priory."

But Faith paid little heed to the lady's words. She was far too agitated and frightened for that. She flung her arms wildly round that stiff, stark figure, and kissed its mouth over and over again with a terrible foreboding. Sir Emery sat there unheeding still. Then Faith started back aghast, with a sudden flash of discovery, and held up her hands in an agony of horror and alarm to heaven. A fierce cry burst inarticulately from her quivering lips.

"He's dead!" she sobbed out in her agony. "He's dead! Oh, father, father!"

And so he was. He had died in harness. "Acute pleurisy, aggravated by exposure," the doctor called it in his official statement next day. But for the present, all Faith knew and felt was that her father was gone, and that she stood there that moment alone in her bereavement.

In time, as she stood there, helpless and un-nerved, a neighbour or two came out and carried him in. He was quite, quite dead: almost as stiff and cold as stone with the frost already. They laid him down tenderly on the horse-hair sofa in the little parlour. Sir Emery Gascoyne, Baronet, had met his death well, performing his duty.

And Miss Boyd-Galloway in the yard without, staring hard at her friend and wringing her hands, remarked more than once in a hushed voice, "This is very awkward indeed, Louisa! How on earth are we to get home without any carriage, I wonder? I really believe we shall have to tramp it!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"LE ROI EST MORT: VIVE LE ROI!"

WITH a heavy heart and with vague forebodings of evil, Paul tramped wearily home along the frozen roadway. As he near Plowden's Court, at the end of that slow and painful march, he saw for himself there were lights in the windows, and signs within of great bustle and commotion.

Cold as it was and late at night, the news had already spread over the neighbourhood that "Gascoyne was gone," and more than one sympathising friend had risen from bed and dropped in to comfort Faith and her mother in their great sorrow. The working classes and the smaller tradesfolk are prompter and franker in their expressions of sympathy with one another than those whom in our self-satisfied way we call their betters. They come to help in the day of trouble, where servants and dependents are not ready at call to do the mere necessary physical work entailed on every house by moments of bereavement.

At the door Mr. Solomons was waiting to receive the poor weary young man. He raised his hat respectfully as Paul straggled in. "Good-evening, Sir Paul," he said, with marked courtesy. And that unwonted salute was the first intimation Paul received of his sudden and terrible loss that awful evening.

"No, no, Mr. Solomons," he cried, grasping the old man's hand with the fervid warmth which rises up spontaneous within us all at moments of deep emotion. "Not that! Not that! Don't tell me so! don't tell me so! Not that! He isn't dead! Not dead! Oh, no, not dead! Don't say so!"

Mr. Solomons shook his head gravely. "Doctor's been here and found him quite dead," he answered, with solemn calmness. "He drove Miss Boyd-Galloway back from

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the Dean's through the snow and wind till he froze on the box. He was too ill to go, and he died at his post, like a Gascoyne ought to do."

Paul flung himself back on a chair and burst at once into a wild flood of tears. His heart was full. He didn't dare to ask for Faith or his mother. Yet, even in that first full flush of a great sorrow, strange to say, he was dimly conscious within himself of that indefinable self-satisfaction which so buoys us up for the moment under similar circumstances. He felt it would always be a comfort to him to remember that he had done his very best to avert that terrible incident, had done his very best to take his father's place that night, and to follow in his footsteps on his last sad journey.

Mr. Solomons moved slowly to the foot of the stairs. "Sir Paul has returned," he called softly to Faith in the room above, where she sat and sobbed beside her dead father.

And, indeed, from that time forth Mr. Solomons seldom forgot to give the new baronet the full benefit of his title whenever he spoke to him, and to exact the rigorous use of it from all and sundry. It was part of his claims on Paul, in fact, that Paul should accept the heavy burden of the baronetcy. Meaning to float him in the social and financial sense, Mr. Solomons appreciated the immense importance of starting Sir Paul as Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, from the very beginning. It must be understood at the outset that this was a genuine titled Gascoyne, and no shadow of a doubt or an incognito of any sort must hang over the fact or the nature of the evidence. It was all very well for Sir Emery to hide his light under a bushel in a country town; but Sir Paul, as exhibited by his financial adviser, must be carefully proclaimed from the housetops in the city of Westminster.

In his own interests Mr. Solomons was determined that everybody should recognise his *protégé* as a man of fashion.

Faith came down and threw herself into her brother's arms. "You did your best, Paul," she cried, faltering; "I know it, I know it!"

The tears stood dim in Mr. Solomons' eyes. He could stand an execution for debt with stoical stolidity, but he could not stand this. He took out his pocket-handkerchief and retired into the stairway, leaving brother and sister to their own silent sympathy.

Slowly and gradually it came home to each of them how great a change that night had wrought in their joint existences. The old life at Hillborough would now be broken up for them both altogether. New ways and fields lay open before them.

The next few days, indeed, were of course taken up by the needful preparations for Sir Emery's funeral. It was a new sensation for Paul to find himself the head of the family, with his mother and sister dependent upon him for aid and advice, and compelled to decide all questions as they arose upon his

own responsibility. Mr. Solomons, however, who had his good side, though he kept it often most studiously in the background, was kindness itself to Paul in this sudden emergency. To say the truth, he liked the young man; and, with his ingrained Jewish respect for rank, he was proud of being able to patronise a real British baronet. He had patronised Sir Emery already, to be sure; but, then, Sir Emery had never been born in the purple. He was at best but a country cabman who had unexpectedly inherited a barren baronetcy. It was otherwise with Paul. Mr. Solomons was determined that, as his young friend had had an Oxford education, so he should be received everywhere from the very beginning in his own proper place in English Society. The fact was, Mr. Solomons' relations with Paul had made him feel, at last, a certain parental interest in his young debtor's position and prospects. Regarding him at first merely in the light of a precarious investment, to be diligently exploited for Mr. Lionel's ultimate benefit, he had come in the end to regard him with some personal liking and fondness, as a pupil with whose progress in life he might be fairly satisfied. So he came out well on this occasion—so well, indeed, that for several days after the sad event he never mentioned to Paul the disagreeable fact about his having neglected to pay Sir Emery's life-premium on the very day of that fatal engagement.

The neglect left Paul still more heavily indebted than he might otherwise have been. But as he had voluntarily assumed all responsibility for the debt himself, he had really nothing on this ground to complain of.

The funeral was fixed for Wednesday, the tenth. On Tuesday afternoon, as Paul sat alone in the little front parlour with the spotted dog on the mantelpiece—that spotted dog of his father's that Faith had so longed for years to remove, and that he wouldn't now have removed from its familiar place for untold thousands—he heard a well-known sturdy voice inquire of the stable-boy who lounged about the door, "Is this Sir Paul Gascoyne's? Does he happen to be in? Will you give him my card, then?"

With no shadow of shame or compunction on his face, Paul flung open the door and welcomed his old college friend into that dingy little sitting-room.

"Why, Thistleton," he cried, "this is so kind, so good of you! You're the only one of all my Oxford acquaintances who's come to see me, although, of course, I didn't expect them. But you were in Yorkshire last week and meant to stay there. What on earth's brought you down to this part of England so suddenly?"

The blonde young man's face on receiving this question was a study to behold. It would have made the fortune of a rising dramatic artist. He changed his hat in his hand awkwardly as he answered with a distinctly shame-faced air:

"I thought—as a mark of respect for the family—I ought to be present at Sir Emery's funeral. And, indeed, my father and mother thought that, in view of existing and future circumstances, I couldn't possibly absent myself."

Paul failed to grasp the precise reason for this interposition on the part of the senior Thistletons in so strictly private and personal an affair as his father's funeral; for as yet he had no idea of the state of relations between Faith and his friend, but he confined himself for the moment to asking in some surprise, "Why, how did you hear at all about my poor father?"

The blonde young man hesitated even more remarkably and distinctly than before. Then he blurted out the truth with that simple-hearted directness of speech which was natural to him: "Faith wrote and told me," he answered in a straightforwardness.

It struck Paul as odd, even in that time of trouble, that Thistleton should speak of his sister as "Faith" and not as "Miss Gascoyne," as he had always been accustomed to do at Oxford; but he set it down to the privilege of intimacy with the family, and to the greater frankness of tongue which we all of us use when death breaks down for a moment the conventions and barriers of our artificial intercourse. Still, it certainly did strike him as odd that Faith should have found time at such a moment to write of her loss to a mere casual acquaintance.

Thistleton rightly interpreted the puzzled look upon Paul's face, and went on sheepishly, though with charming frankness: "I hadn't heard for several days, much longer than usual, indeed, so I telegraphed night before last to ask the reason."

Then a light burst in all at once upon Paul's mind; he saw it all, and was glad, but he forebore to speak of it under existing circumstances.

"Might I see Faith?" the blonde young man inquired timidly.

"I'll ask her," Paul answered, moving slowly up the stairs to the room where his sister sat alone in her grief with their mother.

But Faith only shook her head very decidedly. "Not now, Paul," she said; "it was kind of him to come, but tell him I can't see him—till, till after to-morrow."

"Perhaps he won't stay," Paul put in, without attaching much importance himself to the remark.

"Oh yes!" Faith answered with simple confidence. "Now he's once come he'll stop, of course—at least, until he's seen me."

Paul went back to his friend in the dull little parlour. To his immense surprise, Thistleton, after receiving the message with a frank, satisfied nod, began at once talking about the family plans with an interest that really astonished him. Paul had always liked the blonde young man, and he knew the blonde

young man liked him. But he was hardly prepared for so much personal sympathy in all their arrangements as Thistleton manifested. The blonde young man was most anxious to know where Paul would live and what he would do; whether or not he would at once assume his title; what would become of his mother and Faith; and whether the family headquarters were likely under these new circumstances to be shifted from Hillborough, say, in the direction of London.

All these questions took Paul very much at a disadvantage. Absorbed only in their own immediate and personal loss, he had found no time as yet to think or arrange in any way about the future. All he could say was that he would consider these things at some later time, but that for the moment their plans were wholly undecided.

Thistleton sat still and gazed blankly into the fire.

"I shall have to talk it all over with Faith, you know," he said quietly at last. "I see many reasons for taking things promptly in hand at the moment of the crisis."

"I'm afraid Faith won't be able to talk things over calmly for some weeks at least," Paul answered with deepening wonderment. "This sudden blow, of course, has quite unnerved us. It was so instantaneous, so terrible, so unexpected."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry," Thistleton replied, still gazing straight ahead into the embers of the fire. "Now I'm here, I may as well stop here for the next few weeks or so. They've given me a very comfortable room at the 'Red Lion.' And one thing's clear, now your father's gone, Gascoyne, you've enough to do with those Claims alone; your sister mustn't be allowed to be a further burden upon you."

Paul flushed fiery hot at that way of putting it. He saw now quite clearly what Thistleton was driving at, though he didn't know, of course, what measure of encouragement Faith might already have accorded her wealthy suitor. Oh, those hateful, hateful Claims of Mr. Solomons! If it hadn't been for those, he might have answered proudly, "I will take care myself of my sister's future." But how could he now—he who was mortgaged, twenty years deep, for all his possible earnings to that close-fisted taskmaster? The very thought of it made him hot and cold alternately with deep humiliation.

All he could do was to murmur half aloud, "Faith can almost support herself, even as it is, by her salary as a schoolmistress."

Thistleton answered him very decisively this time.

"Not as she ought to be supported, my dear fellow," he said in a firm tone of voice. "Gascoyne, you and I have always been friends, and at a time like this we may surely speak our minds out to one another. You'll have enough to do to keep yourself and your mother, let alone the Claims; and I know

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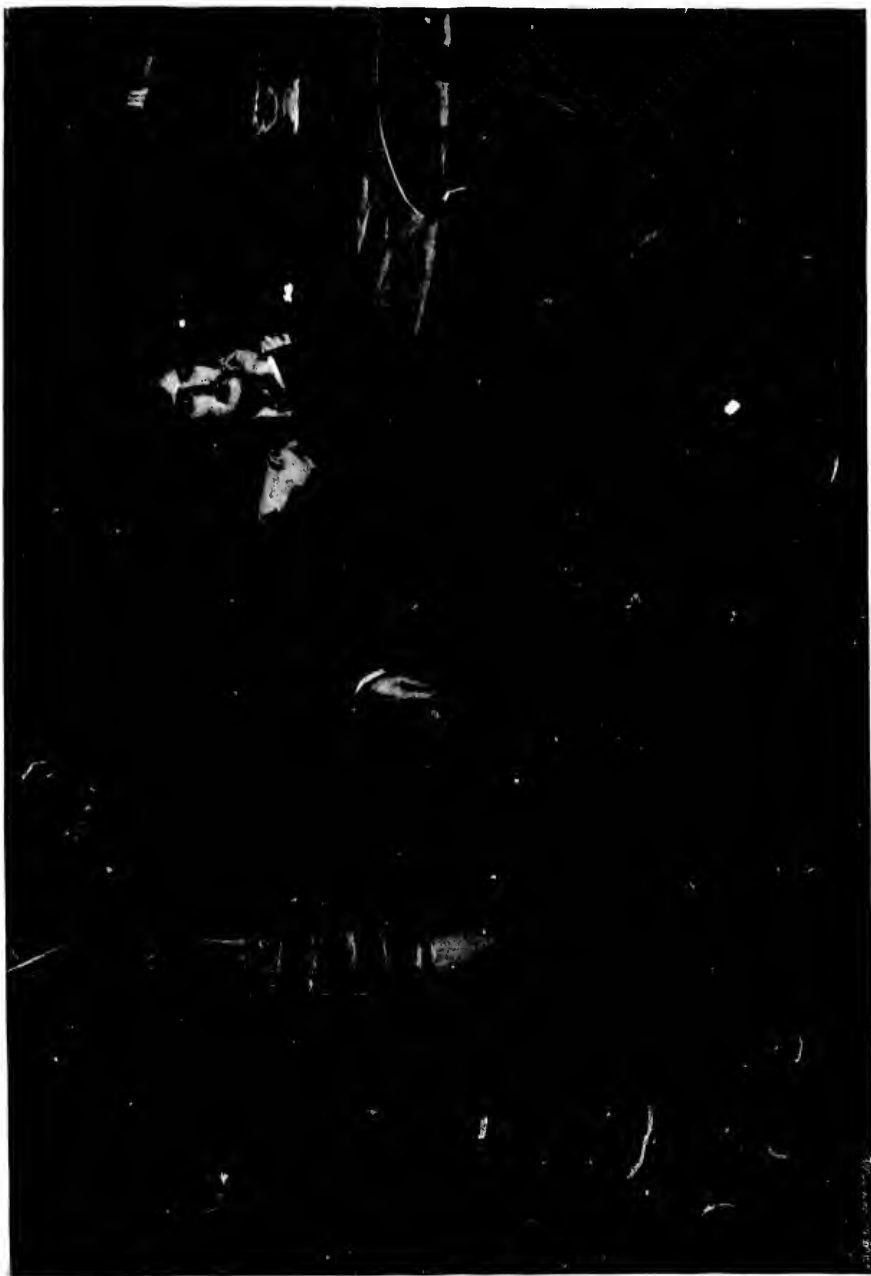
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"He . . . retired into the stairway, leaving brother and sister to their own silent sympathy."

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how they weigh upon you. But Faith mustn't dream of trying to live upon what she earns herself. I could never stand that. It would drive me wild to think she should even attempt it. This has made a great change in the position of all of you. I think when I talk it all over with Faith she'll see the subject in the same light as I do."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

THE morning after the funeral Paul went down, by Mr. Solomons' special desire, to the office in the High Street for a solemn consultation. Mr. Solomons wished to see him "on important business," he said; and Paul, though weary and sick at heart, had been too long accustomed to accept Mr. Solomons' commands as law to think of demurring to a request so worded.

As he entered, Mr. Solomons rose to greet him with stately politeness, and handed him solemnly a little oblong packet, which felt like a box done up in paper. Paul opened it vaguely, seeing so much was expected of him, and found inside, to his immense surprise, a hundred visiting-cards, inscribed in copper-plate "Sir Paul Gascoyne," in neat small letters.

"What are these, Mr. Solomons?" he asked, taken aback for the moment.

Mr. Solomons, rubbing his hands with unctious, was evidently very well pleased at his own cleverness and forethought.

"They're a little present I wished to make you, Sir Paul," he answered, laying great stress upon that emphatic prefix of honour. "You see, I think it necessary, as part of my scheme for our joint benefit, that you should at once assume your proper place in the world and receive recognition at the hands of Society. I desire that you should make a feature of your title at once; that you should be known to all England from the very outset as Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet." He spoke it pompously, like one who basked in the reflected glory of that high-sounding social designation.

"I hate it!" Paul blurted out, unable to restrain his emotion any longer. "Mr. Solomons, I can't bear the whole horrid business. It's a hollow mockery for a man like me. What's the use of a title to a fellow without a penny, who's burdened with more debt than he can ever pay, to start with?"

Mr. Solomons drew back as if he had been stung. He could hardly believe his ears. That a man should wish deliberately to shuffle off the honour of a baronetcy was to him, in his simplicity, well-nigh inconceivable. Not that for the moment he took in to the full Paul's actual meaning. That his pet design,

the cherished scheme of years, could be upset offhand by the recalcitrant obstinacy of a hot-headed youth just fresh from college, lay hardly within the sphere of his comprehension. He contented himself for the time with thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, protruding his already too obvious watch-pocket, and observing jauntily:

"That's exactly why you've got to make the most of the title, Sir Paul. You must use it as your capital—your stock-in-trade. So long as your father lived, of course, we could do very little; we could only point to you as a prospective baronet. Now that Sir Emery's dead and gone, poor gentleman! the case is altered; we can put you forward as the actual possessor of the Gascoyne title. It's extremely fortunate this should have happened (as it had got to happen) so early in the year, before the Peerages are out—they don't publish them till March—and I telegraphed off full details yesterday to the different editors, so that your name may appear in its proper place in due course in the new issues. There's nothing like taking Time by the forelock, you know, Sir Paul; there's nothing on earth like taking Time by the forelock." And Mr. Solomons, standing with his back to the fire and his thumbs in his armholes like a British churchwarden, raised himself gently on the tips of his toes, and let his heels go down again with an emphatic snap, as he pursed up his lips into a most determined attitude.

Paul saw the time for temporizing was passed. While his father lived, he hadn't dared to explain to Mr. Solomons the simple fact that he couldn't and wouldn't sell himself for money to any woman living, lest he should break his father's heart by that plain avowal. But now it would be flat cowardice to delay the confession one day longer. For Mr. Solomons' sake he must take the bull by the horns. Already Mr. Solomons had put himself to needless expense in having those cards printed and in telegraphing to the editors of the various Peerages, on the strength of an understanding which ought long ago to have been broken. There was no help for it now. He must prick the bubble.

So he seated himself nervously in the office-chair, and with hesitating speech, amid awkward pauses, began to break the news as gently as he could to poor startled Mr. Solomons. He told him how as long as his father lived he had felt it his duty to keep silence on the matter. He explained to him in plain and straightforward terms how the plan had been devised and broached and furthered when he himself was too young to understand and enter into its sinister significance; and how, as soon as he had attained to years of discretion, and comprehended the plot in its true colours, a revulsion of feeling had set in which made it impossible for him now to carry out in full the implied engagement. He begged

Mr. Solomons to observe that as soon as he had clearly realized this change of front he had ceased to accept a single penny of his taskmaster's money, but had worked his own way by unheard-of effort through his last two terms for his degree at Oxford. Finally, he assured Mr. Solomons, with many piteous assurances, that he would never be forgetful of the claims upon his purse, his time, and his labour, but would toil like a slave, month after month and year after year, till he had repaid him in full to the uttermost farthing.

How much it cost Paul to make this bold avowal nobody, but himself could ever have realised. He felt at the moment as though he was shirking the dearest obligations in life, and turning his back most ungratefully upon his friend and benefactor. As he went on and on, floundering deeper and deeper in despondency each moment, while Mr. Solomons stood there silent and grim by the fireplace, with his jaw now dropping loose and his thumbs relaxing their hold upon the armholes, his voice faltered with the profundity of his regret, and big beads of nervous dew gathered thick upon his forehead. He knew he was disappointing the hopes of a lifetime, and shaking his own credit at every word he spoke with his powerful creditor.

As for Mr. Solomons, the startled old man heard him out to the bitter end without once interposing a single word of remark—without so much as a nod or a shake of disapprobation. He heard him out in the grimest of grim silences, letting Paul flounder on, unchecked and unaided, through his long rambling explanation of his conduct and motives. Once or twice, indeed, Paul passed in his speech and glanced up at him appealingly; but Mr. Solomons, staring at him still with a fixed hard stare, vouchsafed not even to relax his stern face, and gazed on in blank astonishment at this strange case of mental aberration gradually unfolding itself in the flesh before him. At last, when Paul had exhausted all his stock of arguments, excuses, and reasons, Mr. Solomons moved forward three deliberate paces, and, gazing straight down into the young man's eyes, said slowly and solemnly in the Scriptural phrase, "Paul, Paul, thou art beside thyself."

"Mr. Solomons," Paul answered with a cold shudder down his back, "I mean what I say. You shall never lose a penny of all you've advanced me. You meant it well. You meant it for my advantage. I know all that. But I can never consent to marry an heiress, whoever she may be. I'll work my fingers to the bone, day and night, the year round, to pay you back; but I'll never, never, never consent to pay you back the way you intended."

"You mean it?" Mr. Solomons asked, sitting down in another chair by his side and regarding him closely with curious attention. "Sir Paul Gaseoyne, you really mean it?"

"Yes, I really mean it, Mr. Solomons," Paul answered remorsefully.

To his immense astonishment, Mr. Solomons buried his face in his arms on the office table, and sobbed inarticulately, through floods of tears, in dead silence, for some minutes together.

This strange proceeding, so utterly unexpected, broke down for the moment Paul's courage altogether.

"Oh, Mr. Solomons," he cried, in a frenzy of regret, "I knew I should be disappointing you very much indeed—I knew that, of course; but I never imagined you'd feel like this about it."

Mr. Solomons rocked himself up and down in his chair solemnly for a considerable time without making any answer. Then he rose slowly, unlocked his safe, and took out the well-thumbed bundle of notes and acceptances. One by one he counted them all over, as if to make sure they were really there, with a regretful touch; after which, regarding them tenderly, as a mother regards her favourite child, he locked them all up once more, and flung himself back in the office-chair with an air of utter and abject despondency. "As long as you live, Sir Paul," he said slowly, "handicapped as you are, unless you do as we mean you to do, you can never, never, never repay them."

"I'll try my hardest, at least," Paul answered sturdily.

"There's the horses and cabs," Mr. Solomons went on, as if musing to himself; "but they won't fetch much. As for the furniture in the house, it wouldn't pay the quarter's rent, I expect; and to that extent the landlord, of course, has a prior claim upon it. In fact, it's an insolvent estate—that's the long and the short of it."

"My father's life was insured," Paul ventured to suggest.

Mr. Solomons hesitated with natural delicacy.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Sir Paul," he answered after a long pause, "the premium was due the day before your father's unfortunate death, and I neglected to pay it. I meant to do so the very next morning, but was too late. But I didn't like to mention the fact to you before, in the midst of so much other personal trouble."

"That was very kind of you, Mr. Solomons," Paul put in in a very low voice.

Mr. Solomons ran his fat hand through his curly black hair, now deeply grizzled.

"Not at all, Sir Paul," he answered, "not at all. Of course, I couldn't dream of obtruding it on you at such a time. But what I was thinking's this—that the failure of the policy largely increases the amount of your indebtedness. It was "jointly and severally" from the beginning, you remember; and when you came of age you took the entire responsibility upon yourself in this very room here."

And Mr. Solomons walked once more towards the safe in the corner, as if to assure himself again of the safety, at least, of those precious papers.

"I admit it to the full," Paul answered, frankly.

Mr. Solomons turned upon him with unexpected gentleness.

"Sir Paul," he said, seriously, "my dear Sir Paul, it isn't so much that—that's not the worst of it. It's the other disappointment I mind the most—the strictly personal and private disappointment. The money I'll get paid back in the end; or, if I don't live to see it paid back, why, Leo will, and I always regarded it as a long investment for Leo. A man sinks his money in land for the rise as long as that, every bit, and is satisfied if his children come in for the benefit of it. But, Sir Paul, I thought of you always as a success in life—as great and rich—as married to a lady you ought to marry—as holding your own in the county and the country. I thought of you as sitting in Parliament for a division of Surrey. I thought I'd have helped to make you all that; and I thought you'd feel I'd had a hand in doing it. Instead of that, I've only hung a weight like a millstone round your neck, that I never intended—a weight that you'll never be able to get rid of. Sir Paul! Sir Paul! it's a terrible disappointment."

Paul sat there long, talking the matter over from every possible point of view, now perfectly friendly, but never getting any nearer to a reconciliation of their conflicting ideas. Indeed, how could he? When he rose to go, Mr. Solomons grasped his hand hard.

"Sir Paul," he said, with emotion, "this is a hard day's work. You've undone the task I've been toiling at for years. But perhaps in time you'll change your mind. Perhaps some day you'll see some lady——"

Paul cut him short at once.

"No, never," he said. "Never."

Mr. Solomons shook his hand hard once more.

"Well, never mind," he said; "remember, I don't want in any way to press you. Repay me whenever and however you can; it's all running on at interest meanwhile, renewable annually. Work hard and pay me, but not too hard. I trust you still, Sir Paul, and I know I can trust you."

As soon as Paul was gone, Mr. Solomons could only relieve his mind by taking the first train up to town, and pouring the whole strange, incredible story into the sympathetic ears of his nephew, Mr. Lionel.

Lionel Solomons listened to his uncle's narrative with supercilious disdain; then he rose, with his sleek thumbs stuck into his waistcoat pockets and his fat fingers lolling over his well-covered hips, in an attitude expressive of capitalist indifference to such mere sentimentalism as Paul had been guilty of.

"The fellow's of age, and he's signed for

the lot, that's one comfort," he observed, complacently. "But I've got no patience with such pig-headed nonsense myself. What's the good of being born to a baronetcy, I should like to know, if you ain't going to make any social use of it?"

"It's chucking it away—just chucking it away—that's true," his uncle assented.

Mr. Lionel paused, and ran one plump hand easily through his well-oiled curls.

"For my part," he said, "if ever those papers come to me——"

"They'll all come to you, Leo; they'll all come to you," his uncle put in, affectionately. "What else do I toil and moil and slave and save for?"

Mr. Lionel faintly bowed a gracious acquiescence.

"If ever those papers come to me," he continued, unheeding the interruption, "I'll not let him off one farthing of the lot, now he's signed for 'em all after coming of age—not if he works his life long to pay me off the whole, principal and interest. He shall suffer for his confounded nonsense, he shall. If he won't pay up, as he ought to pay up, in a lump at once, and if he won't go to work the right way to make himself solvent, I'll grind him and dun him, and make his life a burden to him, till he's paid it all to the uttermost farthing. He's a fool of a sentimentalist, that's just what he is—with an American girl ready to pay him a good round sum for the title, as I've reason to believe, if he'll only marry her."

"Leo!" his uncle exclaimed disapprovingly.

"I'll tell you what it is," the nephew continued, tilting himself on tiptoe, and shutting his mouth hard till the lips pursed up to express decision of character, "the fellow's in love with some penniless girl or other. I've known that a long time; he was always getting letters from some place in Cornwall, in a woman's hand, that he put away unopened, and read in his bed-room; and he's going to throw overboard your interest and his own, just to satisfy his own foolish, sentimental fancy. I could forgive him for throwing yours overboard for a pretty face, for that's only human; but to throw over his own, why, it's simply inexcusable. He shall pay for this, though. If ever I come into those papers he shall pay for it!"

"Leo," the elder man said, leaning back in his chair and fixing his eye full upon his uncompromising nephew.

"Well, sir," Mr. Lionel answered, replacing his thumbs in his waistcoat-pocket.

"Leo," Mr. Solomons repeated slowly, "I often wish you were a little more like Paul. I often wish I'd sent you, instead of him, to Oxford to college."

"Well, I don't, then," Mr. Lionel responded, with a short toss of his head. "I'm precious glad you put me where I am—in the proper place for a man to make money in—in the City."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE.

THE air of Surrey suited the blonde young man's complaint to a T. Thistleton spent some two or three weeks at Hillborough, and seemed in no very great hurry to return to the bleak North from his comfortable quarters at the "Red Lion." Meanwhile Paul was busy clearing up his father's affairs, selling what few effects there remained to sell, and handing over the proceeds, after small debts paid, as remnant of the insolvent estate, to Mr. Solomon. Mr. Solomons received the sum with grin satisfaction; it was a first instalment of those terrible CLAIMS of his, and better than nothing; so he proceeded to release a single small note accordingly, which he burnt in the office fire before Paul's very face, with due solemnity. Then, as if to impress on his young friend's mind the magnitude of the amount that still remained unpaid, he counted over the rest of the bills in long array, jointly and severally, and locked them up once more with his burglar-proof key—Chubb's best design—in that capacious safe of his.

Much yet remained for Paul to arrange. The family had now to be organized on a fresh basis; for it was clear that in future the new baronet must support his mother, and to some extent, apparently, his sister also. His own wish, indeed, was that they should both accompany him to London; but to that revolutionary proposal his mother would never for a moment accede. She had lived all her life long at Hillborough, she said, among her own people, and she couldn't be dragged away now, in her old age, from her husband's grave and her accustomed surroundings. Paul thought it best, therefore, to arrange for a couple of rooms in a cottage in Plowden's Court, hard by, where Faith and she might take up their abode for the present.

It was only for the present, however, so far as Faith was concerned. For before Thistleton left Hillborough he had sat one afternoon with Faith in the bare little parlour, and there, before the impassive face of the spotted dog, once more discussed that important question which he had broached to her last spring in the flowery meadows at Ensham. At first, of course, Faith would have nothing to say to any such subversive scheme. She wouldn't leave her mother, she said, alone in her widowhood. She must stay with her and comfort her, now nobody else was left to help her. But Thistleton had a strong card to play this time in the necessity for relieving Paul of any unnecessary burden.

"Faith," he said, taking her hand in his own persuasively—there is much virtue in a gentle pressure of the human hand—"you know you as good as promised me at Oxford, and we only put it off till a more convenient season."

"Why, I never promised you, Mr. Thistleton," Faith retorted, half-angry.

"I said, you as good as promised me," the blonde young man corrected, unperturbed. "We left it open. But now, you know, Paul's left the sole support of the entire family, and it becomes your duty to try and relieve him as far as possible. If you and I were married, your mother could often come and stop with us for a time—in Sheffield or London; and, at any rate, Paul would be freed from all anxiety on your account. For my part, I think it's a duty you owe him."

"I won't marry anyone as a duty to Paul," Faith exclaimed, firmly, bridling up like a Gascayne, and trying to withdraw her fingers from the hand that imprisoned them.

"I don't ask you to," Thistleton answered, with another soothing movement of that consolatory palm. "You know very well it isn't that: I want you for yourself. I telegraphed to my people last spring: 'The lady accepts, but defers for the present.' So you see, the question of marrying me was settled long ago. It's only the question of *when* that we have to talk about now. And I say this is a very convenient time, because it'll make it a great deal easier for Paul to arrange about your mother and himself comfortably."

"There's something in that," Faith admitted, with a grudging assent.

So the end of it was that, after many protests, Faith gave in at last to a proposal to be married in March—a very quiet wedding, of course, because of their deep mourning; but, as Thistleton justly remarked, with a triumphant sigh of relief, a wedding's a wedding, however quiet you make it. And it was Faith, not the festivities, that he himself attached the greatest importance to.

At the end of three weeks, therefore, the blonde young man returned to Yorkshire with victory in his van (whatever that may be); and Mrs. Thistleton, senior, was in a position to call upon all her neighbours in Sheffield—master-outlers' wives every one of them to a woman—with the proud announcement that her son Charles was to be married in March to the sister of his Oxford friend, Sir Paul Gascayne, Baronet, who had lately succeeded to his father's title. And all the other ladies in Sheffield looked out the baronetcy in Debrett forthwith, as in duty bound; and when they found it was quite an ancient creation, of seventeenth-century date, and unconnect'd with cutlery, were ready to die with envy to think that that fat old Mrs. Thistleton, a person in no wise richer or more distinguished than themselves, should become connected at last with most undoubted aristocracy.

At Hillborough, meanwhile, the sister and daughter of those noble fourteenth and fifteenth baronets had a busy time in her own small room, making such preparations as she was able for that quiet wedding, which must nevertheless tax the family resources to the very utmost. Indeed, it gave Paul no small qualms of conscience to buy the strict neces-

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series for so important an occasion; for how could he devote to his sister's needful outfit—the outfit indispensable for the wedding-day itself, if she was not to put the Thistleton family to open shams—a single penny of his precarious earnings, without neglecting the just claims of Mr. Solomons? Paul felt even more painfully than ever before how he was tied hand and foot to his remorseless creditor. It was impossible for him to spend money on anything beyond the barest necessities without feeling he was wronging his universal assignee.

However, he put it to himself on this special occasion that for Faith to be married, and to be married well, was, after all, the very best thing in the end for Mr. Solomons' interests. It would leave him freer to earn money with which ultimately to repay those grinding claims; and so he judged he might honestly devote part of his still very modest income to buying what was most indispensable for Faith's wedding. Faith herself, with the help of the little dressmaker from the neighbouring court, would do all the rest; and, fortunately, their mourning gave them a good excuse for making the wedding preparations on the smallest possible scale of expenditure under the circumstances.

So as soon as everything was arranged at Hillborough, and Faith and her mother fairly settled into modest lodgings, Paul returned once more for a day to his rooms in Pimlico. But it was only in order to remove his books and belongings from the chambers he shared with Mr. Lionel Solomons to a new address across the City. The welcome change had been forced upon him by his interview with his old provider. Mr. Lionel's society had never been agreeable to him; and now that he had cleared up matters with the uncle at Hillborough, Paul saw no reason why he should any longer put up with the nephew's company in London. Besides, he contemplated now living on a still more modest basis than before, since it would be needful for him in future to support his mother as well as himself out of his journalistic earnings.

Mr. Lionel met his proposals for removal with a shrug of contempt.

"I suppose now you're a baronet," he said, just suppressing a decent sneer, "you think yourself too fine to associate any longer with City gentlemen?"

"On the contrary," Paul answered; "now that I shall have to keep my mother as well as myself, I must manage to do with smaller and cheaper lodgings."

"Well, you're a devilish odd fellow!" Mr. Lionel remarked, with a cheerful smile, provoked in part by the sight of an embossed coronet that just peeped from the corner of a dainty note on the mantelpiece. "If I were a baronet, I wouldn't do like you, you may bet your last sixpence. If I didn't intend to marry tin, at any rate I'd go in for making money in a modest way as a guinea-pig."

Paul's ignorance of City ways was so profound that he answered with a puzzled expression of countenance: "What is a guinea-pig?"

"A guinea-pig," Mr. Lionel condescended to explain, gazing down with approbation at his own well-filled waistcoat—"a guinea-pig is a gentleman of birth, rank, title, or position, who accepts a seat at a board as director of a company, which he guarantees by his name, receiving in return a guinea a day every time he attends a meeting of the directorate. For example, let's suppose I want to start an Automatic Pork Pie Company, or a Universal Artificial Guano Supply Association, Limited. Very well, then; I promote the company myself, and get two or three City people—good men, of course—to back me up in it. And I ask you to let me print your name at the head of the list. Directors: Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart.; Timothy Twells, Esquire (Twells, Twemlow, and Handsomebody); and so forth and so forth. You give your name and you draw your guinea. We consider the advertisement worth that amount. And a person who lives by so lending his name to industrial undertakings is called a guinea-pig."

"But I couldn't be a director of a public company," Paul answered, smiling. "I don't know anything at all about business."

"Of course not," Mr. Lionel retorted. "That's just where it is. If you did, you'd be meddling and enquiring into the affair. That's exactly the good of you. What we particularly require in an ideal guinea-pig is that he should attend his meeting and take his fee and ask no questions. Otherwise he's apt to be a confounded nuisance to the working directorate."

"But I call that dishonest," Paul exclaimed warmly. "A man lends his name and his title, if he has one, if I understand what you mean, in order to induce the public at large to believe this is a solid concern, with an influential board of directors; and you want him to do it for a guinea a day without so much as inquiring into the solidity of the undertaking!"

Mr. Lionel's face relaxed into a broad smile.

"Well, you *are* a rum one!" he answered, much amused at Paul's indignant warmth. "I don't want you to do it. It don't matter tuppence either way to me whether you sink or swim. You're at liberty to starve, so far as I'm concerned, in the most honest and Quixotic way that seems good to you. All I say is that if I were you I'd go in, for the present—till something neat turns up in the matrimonial line—for being a professional guinea-pig. I throw out the hint for your consideration, free, gratis, given away for nothing. If you don't like it, you're at liberty to leave it. But you needn't jump down a man's throat, for all that, with your moral remarks, as if I was an idiot."

"I don't care to sell my name for money to

anybody," Paul answered, growing hot; "either to men or women. I never sought the title myself: it's been thrust upon me by circumstances, and I suppose I must take it. But if I bear it at all, I trust I shall so bear it as to bring no disgrace upon my honest ancestors. I will lend it or sell it to nobody for my own advantage."

"So my uncle informed me," Mr. Lionel answered, showing his even teeth in a very ugly smile, and once more ogling that coroneted note-paper; "and I'll tell you what I think of you, Gascayne—I think you're a fool for your pains: that's just my candid opinion of you! you're a sight too sentimental, that's where it is, with these notions and ideas of yours. You'll find when you've mixed a little more with the world, as I've done in the City, you'll have to come down a bit at last from that precious high horse of yours. If you don't, he'll throw you, and then there'll be an end of you. And I've got another thing to tell you, too, now I'm once about it. My uncle Judah ain't as strong a man by any means as he looks. His heart's a-tected. His doctor tells me so. He can't stand running about too much. Some day he'll go running to catch a train, getting too much excited over a matter of a bargain, or putting himself in a fluster at an execution; and hi presto! before he knows where he is, his heart'll go pop, and there'll be the end of him."

"Well?" Paul said, drawing his breath slowly, with a faint apprehension of Mr. Lionel's probable meaning.

"Well, then," Mr. Lionel went on, unmoved, that ugly smile growing more marked than before, "I'll inherit every stiver my uncle leaves—and, amongst the rest, those precious notes-of-hand of yours."

"Yes," Paul answered, growing uncomfortably warm again.

"Yes," Mr. Lionel repeated, fixing his man with those nasty eyes of his; "and I'll tell you what, Gascayne—Sir Paul Gascayne, Baronet—you'll find you've got a very different sort of man to deal with from my uncle Judah. Sentimentality won't go down with me, I can tell you. It ain't my line of country. You think you can do as you like with my uncle, because he takes a sort of personal interest in you, and feels proud of you as his own tame live baronet that he's raised by hand, and sent to college at his own expense, and floated in the world, and made a gentleman of. You think you can force him to wait as long as you like for his money. But mark my words—my uncle's life ain't worth a year's purchase. No office in the City'd take him at any rate he'd like to offer. It's touch and go with that ramshackle old heart of his. So my advice to you is, don't put him to a strain, if you don't want to lose by it. For when once those papers come into my hands, I give you fair warning, I'll have my money's worth out of them. I'll drive you to marry somebody who'll pay me

up in full, I can tell you that; or, if I don't, I'll have you shown up for a defaulter, as you are, in every paper in England. They shall know how you got your education by fraud, and then turned round and refused to carry out your honest bargain."

Paul's lips quivered, and his cheek was pale, but he made no reply to this coarse outburst of the inner self in Lionel Solomons. He knew too well what was due to his own dignity. He went without a word into his bedroom next door, packed up his few belongings as hurriedly as he could, and slipped out himself to call a hansom. Then, bringing down his portmanteau to the door in his own hands, he left Mr. Lionel in undisturbed possession of their joint apartments, and started off to his new rooms in a by-way off Gower Street.

Nevertheless, that hint of a possible eventuality disturbed his mind not a little in the night watches. It was a fact, indeed, that Mr. Solomons' heart was a feeble member; and Paul by no means relished the idea of being left with such a man as Mr. Lionel for his life-long creditor.

As for Mr. Lionel, no sooner was Paul's back turned than he drew out a photograph from his inner breast-pocket with effusion, and gazed at it tenderly. It was a photograph of a lady of mature and somewhat obviously artificial charms, enclosed in a scented russial-leather case with a gilt coronet.

"Well, he did me one good turn, anyhow," Mr. Lionel murmured, with a rapturous look at the lady's face, "when he introduced me to the Ceriolo. And now he's gone, I'm not sorry to be rid of him, for I can ask her here to supper as often as I like next summer, with no chance of its getting round in the end to Uncle Judah."

For Mr. Lionel's charmer had now gone abroad, as was her wont, to winter-quarters. But even in those remote foreign parts she never neglected to write to her new admirer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

How curiously different things look to each of us according to our particular point of view! While Faith at Hillborough and Paul in London were reflecting seriously how to make things decent for the Thistleton family at the approaching ceremony, the Thistletons in turn, in their opulent mansion in the park at Sheffield, were all agog with the unwonted excitement of preparation for their Charlie's marriage with the sister of Sir Paul Gascayne, fifteenth baronet.

"The wedding must be in London, of course," Mrs. Thistleton said musingly—she was a comfortable body of a certain age, with a maternal plenitude of face and figure; "and Sir Paul'll give her away himself, you may be

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certain. I suppose they won't want it to be at Hillborough, Charlie? I'd much rather, for my part, you should be married in London."

"I think Faith would prefer it, too," Thistleton answered, smiling. "You must remember, mother dear, I've always told you they live in a very quiet way of their own down at Hillborough; and I fancy they'd rather we were married—well, away from the place, of course, where they've just lost their poor father."

"Naturally," Mrs. Thistleton went on, still turning over with those matronly hands of hers the patterns for her new silk dress for the occasion, sent by post that morning—the richest Lyons—from Swan and Edgar's. "There'll be an account of it in the *World*, I suppose, and in the *Morning Post*, and the bride's dress 'll be noticed in the *Queen*. I declare I shall feel quite nervous. But I suppose Sir Paul will be affable, won't he?"

Her son laughed good-humouredly.

"Gascoyne's a first-rate fellow," he answered unabashed; "but I can hardly imagine his being affable to anybody. To be affable's to be condescending, and Gascoyne's a great deal too shy and retiring himself ever to dream of condescending to or patronizing anyone."

"Well, I hope Faith won't give herself any airs," Mrs. Thistleton continued, laying four fashionable shades of silk side by side in the sunlight for critical comparison; "because your father's a man who won't stand airs; and I should be very sorry if she was to annoy him in any way. It's a great pity she couldn't have come up to stay with us beforehand, so that we might all have got to know a little more about her and not be so afraid of her."

"It would have been impossible," Thistleton replied, gazing across at his mother with an amused air. "But I wish I could disabuse your mind of these ideas about the Gascoynes. Paul and Faith will be a great deal more afraid of you than you are of them; and as to Faith giving herself airs, dear girl! she'll be so awfully frightened, when she comes to stay here, at the size of the house and the number of the servants, that I wouldn't for worlds have had her come to visit us before she's married, or else I'm certain she'd try to cry off again the moment she arrived, for pure nervousness."

"Well, I'm sure I hope you're right," Mrs. Thistleton replied, selecting finally the exact shade that suited her complexion, and laying it down by itself on the costly inlaid table that stood beside the Oriental ottoman in the alcove by the bay-window. "For though, of course, one naturally likes to be connected with people of title, and all that, one doesn't want them to trample one under foot in return for all one's consideration."

But at the very same moment, away over at Hillborough, Faith, as she sat in her simple black frock by the window of her new lodgings stitching away at the skirt of her wedding-

dress with aching fingers, was remarking to her mother:

"What I'm afraid of, dear, is that, perhaps, Charlie's father and mother will turn out, when one comes to know them, to be nothing more or less than nasty rich people." To which her mother wisely answered:

"If they're like himself, Faith, I don't think you need be afraid of them."

In accordance with the wish of both the high contracting parties, it had been finally arranged that the wedding should take place in London. Mr. Thistleton, senior, therefore, went up to town a week or two in advance, "to consult with Sir Paul," whom he was able to guarantee in his letter to his wife the same evening as "extremely amicable." But it would be quite out of the question, the master cutler observed, when he saw the fifteenth baronet's present abode, that Miss Gascoyne should be married from her brother's chambers. (Mr. Thistleton, senior, influenced by somewhat the same motives as Mr. Lionel Solomons, wrote "chambers" in the place of "lodgings" even to his wife, because he felt the simplicity of the latter word unsuitable to the fifteenth baronet's exalted dignity.) So he had arranged with Sir Paul—much against Sir Paul's original wish—to take rooms for the breakfast at a West End hotel, whither the bridal party would proceed direct from the altar of St. George's. Of course the ceremony was to be the simplest possible—only a few very intimate friends of either family; but the master cutler couldn't forbear the pleasure of the breakfast at the hotel, and the display of Sir Paul, in the full glory of his fifteenth baronetcy, before the admiring eyes of a small but select Sheffield audience. If they smuggled their baronet away in a corner, why, their Charlie might almost as well have married any other girl whose name was not to be found in the pages of the British book of honour. To all these suggestions Paul at last gave way, though very unwillingly, and even consented to invite a few common Oxford friends of his own and Thistleton's, including, of course, the invaluable Mrs. Douglas.

From the very first moment of Paul's return from Hillborough, however, it began to strike him with vague surprise and wonder what an immense difference in people's treatment and conception of him was implied by his possession of that empty little prefix of a barren *Sir* before the name bestowed upon him by his sponsors at his baptism. When he took the dingy lodgings in the by-way off Gower Street, and handed the landlady's daughter one of the cards Mr. Solomons had so vainly provided for him, with "Sir Paul Gascoyne" written in very neat copper-plate upon their face, he was amused and surprised at the instantaneous impression his title produced upon the manners and address of that glib young lady. The shrill voice in which she had loudly proclaimed to him the advantages of the rooms, the cheap

price of coals per scuttle, the immediate proximity of the Weslee-yan chapel, and the excellence of the goods purveyed by appointment at the neighbouring beef-and-ham shop, sank down at once to an awestruck "Yes, sir; I'm sure we'll do everything we can to make you comfortable, sir;" the moment her eyes lighted on the talismanic prefix that adorned his name on that enchanted pasteboard.

A few days later Paul decided with regret, after many observations upon his scanty wardrobe, that he really couldn't do without a new coat for Faith's wedding. But when he presented himself in due course at the little tailor's shop in the City ("specially recommended by Mr. Solomons") where he had dealt ever since his first appearance at Oxford, he noticed that the news of his acquisition of dignity had already preceded him into the cutting and fitting-room by the unwonted obsequiousness of both master and assistants as they displayed their patterns. "Yes, Sir Paul," "No, Sir Paul," greeted every remark that fell from his lips with unvarying servility. It was the same everywhere. Paul was astonished to find in what another world he seemed to live now from that which had voted him a scallywag at Mentone.

To himself he was still the same simple, shy, timid, sensitive person as ever; but to everyone else he appeared suddenly transfigured into the resplendent image of Sir Paul Gascoyne, fifteenth baronet.

Strangest of all, a day or two before the date announced for the wedding in the *Morning Post* (for Mr. Thistleton, senior, had insisted upon conveying information of the forthcoming fashionable event to the world at large through the medium of that highly-respected journal), Paul was astonished at receiving a neatly-written note on a sheet of paper with the embossed address, "Gascoyne Manor, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire." It was a polite intimation from the present owner of the Gascoyne estates that, having heard of Sir Paul's accession to the baronetcy, and of his sister's approaching marriage to Mr. C. E. Thistleton, of Christ Church, Oxford, he would esteem it a pleasure if he might be permitted to heal the family breach by representing the other branch of the Gascoyne house in his own proper person at the approaching ceremony. Paul looked at the envelope; it had been re-addressed from Christ Church. For the first time in his life he smiled to himself a cynical smile. It was evident that Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, while indisposed to admit his natural relationship to the Hillborough cabman, was not unalike to the advantages of keeping up his dormant connection with Sir Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, Oxford, fifteenth baronet.

However, it appeared to Paul on two accounts desirable to accept the olive-branch thus tardily held out to him by the other division of the Gascoyne family. In the first

place, he did not desire to be on bad terms with anyone, including even his own relations. In the second place, he wished for the Thistletons' sake that some elder representative of the Gascoyne stock should be present, if possible, at his sister's wedding. His mother absolutely refused to attend, and neither Paul nor Faith had the heart to urge her to reconsider this determination. Their recent loss was sufficient excuse in itself to explain her absence. But Paul was not sorry that this other Gascoyne should thus luckily interpose to represent before the eyes of assembled Sheffield the senior branches of the bride's family.

Nay, what was even more remarkable, Paul fancied the very editors themselves were more polite in their demeanour, and more ready to accept his proffered manuscripts, now that the perfect purity of his English style was further guaranteed by his accession to the baronetcy. Who, indeed, when one comes to consider seriously, should write our mother-tongue with elegance and correctness if not the hereditary guardians of the Queen's English? And was it astonishing, therefore, if even the stern editorial mouth relaxed slightly when office-boys brought up the modest pasteboard which announced that Sir Paul Gascoyne, baronet, desired the honour of a ten minutes' interview? It sounds well in conversation, you know, "Sir Paul Gascoyne, one of our younger contributors—he writes those crisp little occasional reviews on the fourth page upon books of travel." For the wise editor, who knows the world he lives in, will not despise such minor methods of indirectly establishing public confidence in the "good form" and thorough Society tone of his own particular bantling of a journal.

Well, at last the wedding-day itself arrived, and Faith, who had come up from Hillborough the night before to stop at Paul's lodgings, set out with her brother from that humble street, in the regulation coach, looking as pretty and dainty in her simple white dress as even Thistleton himself had ever seen her. They drove alone as far as the church; but when they entered, Paul was immensely surprised to see what a crowd of acquaintances and friends the announcement in the papers had gathered together. Armitage was there, fresh back from Italy, where he had been spending the winter at Florence in the pursuit of art; and Paul couldn't help noticing the friendly way in which that arbiter of reputations nodded and smiled as Faith and he walked, tremulously, up the aisle together. The Douglasses from Oxford were there, of course, and a dozen or two of undergraduates or contemporaries of Paul's, who had rather despised the scallywag than otherwise while they were at college in his company. Isabel Boyton and her momma occupied front seats, and smiled benignly upon poor trembling Faith as she entered. The kinsman Gascoyne, of Gascoyne

Manor, met them in the chancel, and shook hands warmly—a large-built, well-dressed man of military bearing and most squararchical proportions, sufficient to strike awe by his frock-coat alone into the admiring breasts of all beholders. The Sheffield detachment was well to the fore, also strong and eager; a throng of wealthy folk, with the cutlery stamp on face and figure, craning anxiously forward when the bride appeared, and whispering loudly to one another in theatrical undertones, 'That's Sir Paul that's leading her; oh, isn't he just nice-looking!' Thistleton himself was there before them, very manly and modest in his wedding garment, and regarding Faith as she faltered up the aisle with a profound gaze of most unfeigned admiration. And everybody was pleased and good-humoured and satisfied, even Mrs. Thistleton senior being fully set at rest, the moment she set eyes on Paul's slim figure, as to the fifteenth baronet's perfect affability.

It is always much more important in life what you're called than what you are. He was just the very selfsame Paul Gascoyne as ever, but how differently now all the world regarded him!

As for Faith, when she saw the simple, eager curiosity of the Sheffield folk, and their evident anxiety to catch her eye and attract her attention, her heart melted towards them at once within her. She saw in a moment they were not 'nasty rich people,' but good, honest, kindly folk like herself, with real human hearts beating hard in their bosoms.

So Faith and Thistleton were duly proclaimed man and wife by the Reverend the Rector, assisted in his arduous task by the Reverend Henry Edward Thistleton, cousin of the bridegroom. And after the ceremony was finally finished, and the books signed, and the signatures witnessed, the bridal party drove away to the hotel where Mr. Thistleton senior had commanded lunch; and there they all fraternized in unwonted style, the Master Cutler proposing the bride's health in a speech of the usual neatness and appropriateness, while Mr. Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, performed the same good office for the bridegroom's constitution. And the elder Thistletons rejoiced exceedingly in the quiet dignity of the whole proceedings; and even Faith (for a woman will always be a woman still) was glad in her heart that Mr. Gascoyne, of Gascoyne Manor, had lent them for the day the countenance of his greatness, and not left them to bear alone in their orphaned poverty the burden of the baronetcy. And in the afternoon, as the *Morning Post* next day succinctly remarked, "the bride and bridegroom left for Dover, en route for Paris, Rome, and Naples," while Sir Paul Gascoyne, fifteenth baronet, returned by himself, feeling lonely indeed, to his solitary little lodgings in the road off Gower Street.

But it had been a very bright and happy day on the whole for the National Schoolmistress.

And when Mrs. Douglas kissed her on both cheeks, and whispered, "My dear, I'm so glad you've married him!" Faith felt she had never before been so proud, and that Charlie was a man any girl in the world might well be proud of.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

MADAME CERIOLO had passed the winter in Italy—or, to be more precise, at Florence. Her dear friend (she wrote to Lionel Solomons), the Countess Spinelli-Feroni, had asked her to come out and stay with her as companion at her beautiful villa on the Viale dei Colli, so as to assume the place of chaperon to her accomplished daughter, Fede, now just of an age to take part as a *débutante* in the world's frivolities. The poor dear Countess herself had been paralyzed last year, and was unable to accompany that charming girl of hers, who couldn't of course, be allowed to go out alone into the wicked world of modern Florence. So she thought her at once of her dear old friend, Maria Agnese Ceriolo. As a matter of fact, as everybody knows, the Spinelli-Feroni family became totally extinct about a hundred years ago; and Madame Ceriolo had been made aware of their distinguished name only by the fact that their former Palazzo, near the Ponte Santa Trinita, is at present occupied by Vieusseaux's English Circulating Library. The title, however, is a sufficiently high-sounding one to command respect, and doubtless answered Madame Ceriolo's purpose quite as well as any other she could possibly have hit upon of more strictly modern and practical exactitude.

It may be acutely conjectured that a more genuine reason for the little lady's selection of her winter abode might have been found in the fact that Armitage happened to be spending that season at a hotel on the Lungarno. And Madame did not intend to lose sight of Armitage. She was thoroughly aware of that profound paradox that a professed cynic and man of the world is the safest of all marks for the matrimonial aim of the cosmopolitan adventuress. True to her principle, however, of keeping always more than one string to her bow, she had not forgotten to despatch at the New Year a neat little card to Mr. Lionel Solomons, with the Duomo and Campanile embossed in pale monochrome in the upper left-hand corner, and "*Sinceri auguri*" written across its face in breezy gold letters of most Italianesque freedom. The card was enclosed in one of Madame Ceriolo's own famous little Society envelopes, with the coronet on the flap in silver and gray; and Mr. Lionel was, indeed, a proud and happy man when he read on its back in a neat feminine hand, "*Molti anni felici.*"—M. A. CERIOLO."

To be sure, Mr. Lionel knew no Italian; but it flattered his vanity that Madame Ceriolo

should take it for granted he did. Indeed, Madame Ceriolo, with her usual acuteness, had chosen to word her little message in a foreign tongue for that very reason—so accurately had she gauged Mr. Lionel's human peculiarities.

Early in March, however, Armitage had been suddenly recalled to England on unexpected business, reaching London by mere chance in time to be present at Thistleton's marriage with Faith Gascoyne. So Madame Ceriolo, having nothing further to detain her now in Italy, and being anxious not to let Mr. Lionel languish too long uncheered by her sunny presence—for man is fickle and London is large—decided to return with the first April swallows, after Browning's receipt, to dear, dingy Old England. She stopped for a night or two on her way in Brussels, to be sure, with a member of her distinguished aristocratic family (just then engaged as a scene-shifter at the Théâtre Royal); but by the morning of the fifth she was comfortably settled once more at the Hôtel de l'Univers, and had made Mr. Lionel aware of her serene presence by a short little note couched in the simplest terms: "Back in London at last. This minute arrived. When may I hope to see you? *Toute à vous de cœur.*—M. A. CERIOLO."

Mr. Lionel read that admirably-worded note ten times over to himself—it said so much because it said so little; then he folded it up with his fat, short fingers and placed it next his heart, in his bank-note pocket. He was a man of sentiment in his way, as well as of business, was Mr. Lionel Solomons, and the Ceriolo was undoubtedly a devilish fine woman. It was not for nothing that a countess should write to him thus on her own initialled and coroneted notepaper. A countess in distress is still always a countess. And "*Toute à vous de cœur,*" too! Mr. Lionel was not learned in foreign tongues, but so much at least of the French language his Ollendorffian studies permitted him readily to translate. He hugged himself with delight as he rolled those dainty words on his mind's tongue once more. "*Toute à vous de cœur*" she wrote to him; a devilish fine woman, and a born countess.

It was with infinite impatience that Mr. Lionel endured the routine work of the office in the City that day. His interest in the wobbling of Consols flagged visibly, and even the thrilling news that Portuguese Threes had declined one-eighth, to 53 $\frac{7}{8}$ for the account, failed to rouse for the moment his languid enthusiasm. He bore with equanimity the boom in Argentines, and seemed hardly inclined to attach sufficient importance to the probable effect of the Servian crisis on the doubtful value of Roumanian and Bulgarian securities. All day long, in fact, he was moody and preoccupied; and more than once, when nobody else was looking, he drew from the pocket nearest his heart a tiny square of

cream-laid note, on which he once more devoured those intoxicating words, "*Toute à vous de cœur.*—M. A. CERIOLO."

In the evening, as soon as the office closed, Mr. Lionel indulged himself in the unwonted luxury of a hansom cab—he more usually swelled the dividends of the Metropolitan Railway—and hurried home post-haste to his own rooms to make himself beautiful with hair-oil and a sprig of Roman hyacinth. (Roman hyacinth, relieved with two sprays of pink bouvardia, suited Mr. Lionel's complexion to a T, and could be purchased cheap towards nightfall, to prevent loss by fading, from the florist's round the corner.) He was anxious to let no delay stand in the way of his visit to Madame Ceriolo's *salon*. Had not Madame herself written to him, "This minute arrived"? and should he, the happy swain thus honoured by the fair, show himself unworthy of her marked *empressement*?

So, as soon as he had arrayed his rotund person in its most expensive and becoming apparel (as advertised, four and a half guineas), he hastened down, by hansom once more, to the Hôtel de l'Univers.

Madame Ceriolo received him, metaphorically speaking, with open arms. To have done so literally would, in Madame's opinion, have been bad play. Her policy was to encourage attentions in not too liberal or generous a spirit. By holding off a little at first in the expression of your emotion you draw them on in the end all the more ardently and surely.

And Madame Ceriolo felt decidedly now the necessity for coming to the point with Lionel Solomons. The testimony of her mirror compelled her to admit that she was no longer so young as she had been twenty years ago. To be sure, she was well preserved—remarkably well preserved—and even almost without making up (for Madame Ceriolo relied as little as possible, after all, upon the dangerous and doubtful aid of cosmetics) she was still an undeniably fresh and handsome little woman. Her easy-going life, and the zest with which she entered into all amusements, had combined with a naturally strong and lively constitution to keep the wrinkles from her brow, the colour in her cheeks, and the agreeable roundness in her well-turned figure. Nevertheless, Madame Ceriolo was fully aware that all this could not last for ever. Her exchequer was low—uncomfortably low: she had succeeded in making but little at Florence out of play or bets—the latter arranged on the simple principle of accepting when she won, and smiling when she lost in full discharge of all obligations. Armitage had circled round her like a moth round the candle, but had managed to get away in the end without singeing his wings. Madame Ceriolo sighed a solemn sigh of pensive regret as she concluded that she must declare for the present, at least, upon Lionel Solomons.

Not that she had the very slightest idea of passing the whole remainder of her earthly pilgrimage in that engaging young person's intimate society. Folly of such magnitude would never even have occurred in her wildest moment to Madame Ceriolo's well-balanced and well-regulated intellect. Her plan was merely to suck Mr. Lionel quite dry, and then to fling him away under circumstances where he could be of no further possible inconvenience or annoyance to her. And to this intout Madame Ceriolo had gradually concocted at Florence—in the intervals of extracting five-franc pieces by slow doles from some impoverished Tuscan count or marchese—a notable scheme which she was now in course of putting into actual execution. She had returned to London resolved to "fetch" Mr. Lionel Solomons or to perish in the attempt, and she proceeded forthwith in characteristic style to the task of "fetching" him.

In the shabby little *salon* everything was as neat as neat could be when Mr. Lionel entered to salute his charmer. A bouquet—presented that day by another admirer—stood upon the table by the sofa in the corner, where Madame Ceriolo herself lay in the half-light, her lamp just judiciously shaded from above, and the folds of her becoming, soft-coloured tea-gown arranged around her plump figure with the most studied carelessness. As Lionel approached, Madame Ceriolo held out both her hands in welcome, without rising from her seat or discomposing her dress.

"How nice of you to come so soon?" she cried, pressing either fat palm with dexterously-adjusted pressure. "So long since we've met! And I thought of you at Florence. Even among those delicious Fra Angelicos, and Lippis, and Andreas, and Della Robbias, I often longed to be back in England, among *all* my friends. For, after all, I love England best. I sometimes say to her, With all thy virtues—thy Phillistine, obtrusive hypocritical virtues—England, with all thy virtues, I love thee still!"

Mr. Lionel was charmed. What wit! what playfulness! He sat down and talked, with a vague idea of being a thorough man of the world, about Florence and Italy, and all Madame Ceriolo had seen and done since he last set eyes on her, till he half imagined himself as cosmopolitan as she was. Indeed, he had once run across (when business was slack) for a fortnight to Paris, and made acquaintance with the Continent in the *cafés-chantants* of the Champs-Élysées in that seductive metropolis, so that he almost felt competent to discuss the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace, or to enlarge upon St. Mark's and Milan Cathedrals, with as much glib readiness as Madame Ceriolo herself could do.

As for Madame, she humoured him to the very top of his bent.

"Ah, what a pity it is, Mr. Solomons," she exclaimed, at last, gazing across at him with

a look which was intended to convey the ill-concealed admiration of a simple but all-too-trusting heart," what a pity it is that you, with your high instincts and aspirations—you, who would so much enjoy and appreciate all these lovely things, should be condemned to pass all your youth—your golden youth—in moiling and toiling after the pursuit of wealth in that dreadful City!"

"Well, the City ain't so bad, after all," Mr. Lionel answered dproceatingly, but with a self-satisfied smirk. "There's lots of fun, too, to be had in the City, I can tell you."

"That's true," Madame Ceriolo answered, beaming upon him angelically; "oh, so very true—for you who say it! Of course, whou one's young, everywhere has its delights. Why, I love even this dear old dingy London. At our age, naturally, the universe at large ought to be full of interest for us. But still, I often think to myself, What a terrible thing it is—how badly this world we live in is organised. It's the old who have all the world's money in their hands. It's the young who want it, and who ought to have it."

"Just my notion to a T," Mr. Lionel answered, briskly, gazing at the enchantress with open eyes. "That's exactly what I stick at. What's the good of the tin, I always say, to a lot of helpless and hopeless old mumbling cripples?"

"Quite so," Madame Ceriolo continued, watching his face closely. "What a capital principle it would be, now, if Nature made all of us drop off satisfied, at sixty or thereabouts, like leeches when they're full, and leave all our hoarded wealth to be used and enjoyed by those who have still the spirit to enjoy it."

"Instead of which," Mr. Lionel put in, with a prompt air of acquiescence, "one's relations always go living and living and living on, on purpose to spite one, till eighty-five or ninety!"

"Keeping the young people out of their own so long!" Madame Ceriolo echoed, to pursue the pregnant train of thought uninterruptedly. "Yes, that's just where it is. It's a natural injustice. Now, when I was out over there in Florence, for example, I thought to myself—I can't tell you how often (forgive me, if I confess it): Suppose only Lionel Solomons could be here with me too—you'll pardon me, won't you, for thinking of you to myself as Lionel Solomons?—how much more he'd enjoy this delightful, charming Italian life, with its freedom and its unconventionality, its sunshine and its carnival, than the dreary, dismal, foggy world of London!"

"No, did you really, though?" Lionel cried, open-mouthed. "I'm sure that was awfully good and kind of you, Madame."

"And then I thought to myself," Madame Ceriolo went on, closing her eyes ecstatically, "one afternoon in the Cascine, when the sun

was shining, and the band was playing, and a crowd of young Italian noblemen were pressing round our carriage—Countess Spinelli-Feroni's carriage, you know, where Fede and I were sitting and chatting with them—it came upon me suddenly, as I looked around and missed you: How happy dear Lionel Solomons would be in such a world as this, if only——”

She broke off and paused significantly.

“If only what?” Mr. Lionel asked, with an ogle of delight.

“If only that rich uncle of his, old Cento-Cento, down yonder at Hillborough, were to do his duty like a man and pop off the hooks at once, now there's no further need or use in the world any longer for him.”

“Old what?” Mr. Lionel inquired, not catching the name exactly.

“Old Cento-Cento,” Madame Ceriolo answered, with a beaming smile. “That's what I always call your respected uncle in Italian, to myself. A hundred per cent. it means, you know, in English. I usually think of him in my own mind as old Cento-Cento.”

Mr. Lionel hardly knew whether to be annoyed or not.

“He don't ask more than other people do for the same accommodation,” he objected half grumpily.

“No, doesn't he, though?” Madame Ceriolo replied, with the infantile smile of a simple marble cherub. “Well, I'm sorry for that; for I thought he was laying by a nice round sum for somebody else to enjoy hereafter. And for somebody else's sake I think I could forgive even rank usury to old Cento-Cento. He might behave like a perfect Shylock if he liked, provided only it redounded in the end to somebody else's benefit.”

Mr. Lionel's face relaxed once more. “Well, there's something in that,” he answered, mollified.

“*Something* in that!” the enchantress echoed, with a little start of surprise; “why, there's a great deal in that. There's everything in that—Lionel.” She paused a moment as she let the name glide half reluctantly off her tongue. “For your sake,” she went on, letting her eyelashes fall with a drooping languor, expressive of feminine reserve and timidity, “I almost fancy I could forgive him anything, except his perversity in living for ever. How old is he now, Lionel?”

“Sixty-something,” the younger Mr. Solomons answered ruefully.

“And he may go on living to all eternity!” Madame Ceriolo cried, excited. “When I say ‘to all eternity,’ I mean for twenty years—at our age a perfectly endless period. Oh, Lionel, think how much enjoyment you might get out of that old man's money, if only—if only my plan for dropping off at sixty had met with the approbation of the authorities of the universe!”

“It's very good of you to interest yourself

so much in my happiness,” Mr. Lionel said, melting, and gazing at her fondly.

“Whatever interests you interests me, Lionel,” Madame Ceriolo answered truthfully, for she meant to make what was his hers, and she gazed back at him languishing.

Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. Mr. Lionel was composed of those familiar human histological elements. Leaning over the daughter of Tyrolese aristocracy, he seized Madame Ceriolo's hand, which half resisted, half yielded, in his own. In a fervour of young love even Mr. Lionel could be genuinely carried away by the tender passion—he lifted it to his lips. The Countess in distress permitted him to impress upon it one burning kiss. Then she snatched it away, tremulously, like one who feels conscious of having allowed her feelings to get the better of her judgment in a moment of weakness.

“No, no,” she exclaimed faintly; “not that, not that, Lionel!”

“And why not?” Mr. Lionel asked, bending over her, all eagerness.

“Because,” the Countess in distress answered with a deep-drawn sigh, “I am too, too weak. It can never be. I can never, never burden you.”

Mr. Lionel had hardly before reflected with seriousness upon the question whether he desired to be burdened with Madame Ceriolo as a partner for life or not; but thus suddenly put upon his mettle, he forgot to reason with himself as to the wisdom of his course; he forgot to pause for committee of supply; he forgot to debate the *pros* and *cons* of the state of matrimony; he retained sense enough merely to pour forth his full soul in unpremeditated strains of passionate pleading, as conceived in the East Central postal district. He flung himself figuratively at Madame Ceriolo's feet. He laid his heart and hand at Madame Ceriolo's footstool. He grovelled in the dust before Madame Ceriolo's throne. He begged Madame Ceriolo at all risks and hazards to make him the happiest of mankind at once and for ever.

And being human after all, he meant it all as he said it; he meant it every word, without deduction or discount. She was a devilish fine woman, and she intoxicated him with her presence.

But Madame Ceriolo, with difficulty preserving her womanly dignity and trembling all over with profound regret, reluctantly declined the proffered anatomical specimens. His heart and hand she must perforce deny herself.

“Oh, no,” she answered; “Lionel, dear Lionel, it can never be! Weak as I am, for your sake, I must steel myself. What have I to offer you in return for your love? Nothing but the bare shadow of a noble name—an empty title—a useless coronet. I won't burden any further your youth that ought to

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be so free—while the uncle lives. If old Cento-Cento were to be gathered to his fathers now, or were to see his way to making you a proper allowance—perhaps in time— But as it is—impossible! I won't even wait for you: I won't let you wait for me. Let us both be free, . . . I, at least, will never make any use of my freedom!"

Mr. Lionel rose and paced the *salon*. "You won't have long to wait," he exclaimed, strange thoughts surging within him. "Marie—may I call you Marie?—oh, thank you! I swear it."

Madame Ceriolo dropped back upon her cushions in admirable *eternité*. "Oh, Lionel," she cried, all aghast at his boldness, "whatever you do, whatever you mean, for my sake be prudent!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PLAN PROGRESSES.

WHEN Lionel Solomons left the Hôtel de l'Univers that evening, at a very late hour, Madame Ceriolo lay back on her cushions with a smiling face and laughed low to herself. "Booked!" she murmured, under her breath, much amused. "Distinctly booked! I've only just got to play him carefully now and my fish is landed!" For Madame Ceriolo was not such a purist in her metaphors as many distinguished critics would wish us all to be. She thought in the natural terms of everyday humanity, not in the forced language pedants would fain impose upon us. *They* would have insisted upon it that she must have said to herself "hooked!" not "booked!" in order to guard against a mixture of metaphors. Only, unfortunately, as a matter of fact, being human, she didn't.

But Mr. Lionel went home much perturbed in soul. He had let himself in for Madame Ceriolo in real earnest now, and he must face the difficulty he had himself created in his own path through life. Money must be found somehow; money, money, money, if possible, by fair means; but if those failed, then otherwise.

Not that Mr. Lionel repented him of his choice. She was a devilish fine woman and a real countess. Her notepaper was stamped with an indubitable coronet. She knew the world, and could open the way for him into Society he had never as yet even dreamed of attempting. She could help him to take down that prig Gascogne, who sadly wanted taking down a peg or two. Nothing could be nicer—if only it were practicable. But there came the rub. If only it were practicable!

And the next three weeks were wholly spent by Mr. Lionel Solomons in trying to think how he could make it all possible!

During those few weeks he saw much, it need hardly be said, of Madame Ceriolo. The Countess in distress, having once decided upon

her course of action, had no intention of letting the grass grow under her feet. Her plan was to strike while the iron was hot. The fish must be landed without delay. So she devoted her by no means inconsiderable talents to the congenial task of gently suggesting to Lionel Solomons her own preconceived solution of her own created problem.

She didn't let Lionel see she was suggesting it, of course. Oh, dear no: Madame was far too clever and too cautious for that. To propose, however remotely, that he should do anything dishonourable for her own dear sake would be inartistic and disenchanting. The Countess in distress played her cards more cleverly. She only made him feel, by obscure innuendoes and ingenious half-hints, how admirable a thing it would be in the abstract if the money that lay in Mr. Solomons' safe could be transferred without difficulty to the bottom of his nephew's waistcoat-pocket. Madame Ceriolo had no intention, indeed, of mixing up her own unsullied name with any doubtful transactions in the matter of the proposed readjustment of securities. She avoided all appearance of evil with religious avoidance. During a longer course of life than she cared to admit even to her own looking-glass, she had carefully kept outside the law-courts of her country. She hadn't the slightest idea of entering them now. If swindling must be done, let others swindle; 'twas hers to batten innocently on the booty of the swindled. Her cue was to urge on Mr. Lionel by vague suggestions that suggested nothing—to let him think he was planning the whole thing himself, when, in reality, he was going blindfolded whither his charmer led him.

Nor was it part of her design, either, to commit herself unreservedly to Mr. Lionel for any lengthened period. She saw in him a considerable temporary convenience, whose pickings might even be judiciously applied to the more secure capture of Armitage, or some other equally eligible person, in the remoter futuro. Funds were necessary for the further prosecution of the campaign of life; Mr. Lionel might well consider himself flattered in being selected as the instrument for supplying the sinews of war for the time being to so distinguished a strategist. So Madame Ceriolo contrived to spread her net wide, and to entangle her young admirer artfully within its cunning coils.

It was a Sunday in autumn—that next succeeding autumn—and Madame loll'd once more upon those accustomed cushions. To loll suited the Ceriolo figure; it suggested most amply the native voluptuousness of the Ceriolo charms.

"Zébie," Madame Ceriolo called out to her faithful attendant, "put away these flowers into my bedroom, will you? They are the Armitage's, and the Armitage must be eternally ignored. Set the ugly little Jew's bouquet here by my side. And listen, imbecile; don't

go grinning like that. I expect the little Jew himself to drop in this afternoon. *Entends-tu donc, stupide!* The ugly little Jew, I tell you, is coming. Show him up at once, the minute he arrives, and for the rest, whoever comes, '*Madame ne reçoit pas aujourd'hui;*' now, do you hear me, image?"

"*Oui, Madame,*" Eusébie answered with imperturbable good-humour. "Though I should think Madame ought almost to have cleared out the little Jew by this time."

"*Zébie,*" Madame answered with a not unflattered smile, "you meddle too much. You positively presume. I shall have to speak of your conduct, I fear, to the patron. You are of an impertinence—oh, of an impertinence! What is it to you why I receive this gentleman? His attentions are strictly *pour le bon motif*. Were it otherwise—" Madame leaned back on her cushions and composed her face with profound gravity into the severest imitation of the stern British matron. "Go, *Zébie,*" she continued. "This levity surprises me. Besides, I rather think I hear—*on sonne*. Go down and bring him up. It's the ugly little Jew—I know his footstep."

"Lionel!" Madame Ceriolo was exclaiming a moment later, her left palm pressed unobtrusively about the region of her heart, to still its beating, and her right extended with effusion to greet him. "I hardly expected you would come to-day! A pleasure unexpected is doubly pleasant. Sit down, dear heart"—in German this last—"Ist me take a good look at you now. So delighted to see you!"

Mr. Lionel sat down, and twirled his hat. His charmer gazed at him, but he hardly heeded her. He talked for some minutes with a preoccupied air. Madame Ceriolo didn't fail to note that some more important subject than the weather and the theatre, on both which he touched in passing with light lips, engrossed his soul. But she waited patiently. She let him go on, and went on herself, as becomes young love, with these minor matters.

"And so *Mignonette* was good?" she said, throwing volumes into her glance. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to go with you myself. That box was a temptation. But I think, you know, so long as nothing definite can be arranged between us," and she sighed gently, "it's best I shouldn't be seen with you too much in public. A woman, and especially a woman *qui court le monde toute seule*, can't be too careful, you see, to avoid being talked about. If only for *your* sake, Lionel, I can't be too careful."

Mr. Lionel twirled his hat more violently than ever.

"Well that just what I've come to talk to you about, Marie," he said with some awkwardness—though he called her plain Marie quite naturally now. "So long as nothing definite can be arranged between us, you say. Well,

there it is, you see; I want to put things at last upon a definite basis. The question is, Are you or are you not prepared to trust yourself implicitly to my keeping?"

The Countess in distress started with a well-designed start.

"Oh, Lionel," she cried, like a girl of sixteen, "do you really, really, really mean it?"

"Yes, I really mean it," Mr. Lionel answered, much flattered at her youthful emotion. "I've worked it all out, and I think I do see my way clear before me in essentials at last. But before I take any serious step I wish you'd allow me to explain at full to you."

"No, no!" Madame Ceriolo answered, clapping her hands on her ears and turning upon him with a magnificent burst of feminine weakness and trustfulness. "I'd rather not hear. I'd rather know nothing. It's quite enough for me if you say you can do it. I don't want to be told how. I don't want to ask why. I feel sure you could do nothing untrue or dishonourable. I'm content if you tell me you have solved our problem."

And, indeed, as a matter of fact, it suited Madame Ceriolo's book best to be able to plead entire ignorance of Mr. Lionel's doings, in case that imprudent young gentleman should ever happen to find himself face to face with a criminal prosecution. She knew the chances of the game too well. She preferred to pose rather as dupe than as accomplice.

Lionel Solomons winced a little at that painfully suggested clause, "untrue or dishonourable," but for all that he kept his own counsel.

"At any rate," he went on more cautiously, "whatever I did, Marie, I hope and trust you wouldn't be angry with me?"

"*Angry* with you?" the Ceriolo echoed in a blank tone of surprise. "Angry with you, Lionel! Impossible! Incredible! Inconceivable! How could I be? Whatever you did and whatever you dared, would be right to me, dearest one. However the world might judge it, I at least would understand and appreciate your motives. I would know that your love, your love for me, sanctified and excused whatever means you might be compelled to adopt for *my* sake, Lionel!"

The young man leant forward and pressed that plump hand tenderly.

"Then you'll forgive me," he said, "whatever I may risk for you?"

"Everything," Madame Ceriolo answered with innocent trust, "provided you don't explain to me and ask me beforehand. I have perfect confidence in your wisdom and your honour."

And as she said the last words, she looked up in his face with a guileless look that quite took him captive. For guileless as it was, Lionel Solomons somehow felt in his heart of hearts that Madame Ceriolo, in the most

delicate and graceful manner possible, had mentally winked at him. And the consciousness of that infantile implied wink set him quite at his ease on moral grounds, at any rate.

"We shall have to leave England," he went on after a brief pause, during which his siren had been steadily transfixing him with those liquid eyes of hers.

"That's nothing to me," Madame responded passionately, in soft, low tones. "Where those I love are with me, there is my home. Besides, all Europe is pretty much the same to a woman who has travelled as long as I have done." She sighed once more. "I've been buffeted about the world," she went on, with a pathetic cadence, "in many strange places—Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain—it's all one to me."

"Spain won't do, though," Mr. Lionel responded briskly, half letting out his secret in the candour of private life (as encouraged by Madame). "Spain's played out, they say. No good any longer. A man's no safer there since the last treaty than anywhere else on the Continent."

"I don't quite understand you," Madame went on, once more, with that infantile smile repeated for his benefit, half as a wink and half as a warning. "We shall be safe wherever we go, dear heart, if we're true to one another. Spain would be as good as anywhere else, Lionel."

"Well, I don't mean to go there anyhow," Mr. Lionel rejoined with prudent vagueness. "Marie—can you follow me—across the broad Atlantic?"

The Ceriolo gave a start of pleased surprise.

Nothing on earth would suit her plans so well. It was she herself who, by her dexterous remarks, *à propos des bottes*, had first put into his head the notion of South America as a possible place of refuge from impertinent inquiry. But he didn't know that himself; he thought he had hit upon it all of his own mere notion. And he waited anxiously after playing this very doubtful card; while Madame, pretending to be taken aback with astonishment, turned it over in her own mind with sudden love-lustre infatuation.

"With you, Lionel," she cried, seizing his hand in hers, and pressing it to her lips ecstatically, "I could go to the world's end—anywhere—everywhere!"

And, indeed, if it came to that, the nearer the world's end she got, the easier it would be for her to leave Mr. Lionel in the lurch as soon as she was done with him. In Paris or Madrid he might get in her way in the end and defeat her purpose; but in Rio or Buenos Ayres he would be harmless to hurt her, when the orange once sucked dry, she turned her wandering back anew towards the lodestar of London in search of Armitage.

"Thank you," Mr. Lionel said, with warmth, and embraced her tenderly.

"Will it be New York?" Madame Ceriolo asked, gazing up at him yet again with infinite trustfulness. "Or do you prefer Philadelphia?"

"Well, neither, Marie," Mr. Lionel answered, fearing once more he might rouse suspicion or disgust in that innocent bosom. "I think—the—peculiar circumstances under which we must sail will compel our port to be Buenos Ayres."

"That's a long way off," Madame mused, resignedly—"a very long way off, indeed. But where you are, Lionel, I shall be happy for ever."

The unfortunate young dupe endeavoured to hedge. Madame Ceriolo was forcing his hand too fast.

"Well, I don't say yet I've made up my mind to go," he continued, hastily. "There are contingencies that may occur which might easily prevent it. If my uncle—"

Madame Ceriolo clapped her hand promptly upon his mouth.

"Not one word," she exclaimed, with fervour, "about old Cento-Cento. He's a bad old man not to make things easier for you. It's a sin and a shame you shouldn't be able to come into your own and live comfortably without expatriation. I won't hear the ancient wretch's name so much as uttered in my presence. When you've finally emigrated, and we settle down on your quiet little farm in South America for life, I shall write to the old horror, and just tell him what I think of him."

"Oh no, you won't," Mr. Lionel interposed, hastily.

"Oh yes, I will," Madame Ceriolo persisted, all smiles.

Mr. Lionel glanced across at her in doubt once more. Was she really so childishly innocent as she seemed? Or was she only doing it all just to keep up appearances? He was almost half afraid she really meant what she said. For a moment he faltered. Was it safe, after all, to run away with this guileless creature?

Madame Ceriolo read the passing doubt in his eyes. And she answered it characteristically. She drew out from her pocket a little packet of thin rice-paper and a pouch of delicately-scented Russian tobacco.

"Let me roll you a cigarette," she said, peering deep into his eyes.

Her gaze was full of unspeakable comprehension.

"Thanks," he answered.

And she proceeded to roll it. How deftly those plump but dainty little fingers did their familiar work! He watched and admired. What a magical charm, to be sure, that fawn-eyed Countess carried about with her! He took the cigarette from her hand, and she held the match herself to him. Then she went on to roll a second for herself. As soon as it was finished she placed it jauntily between those

rich red lips and lighted it from his. How their eyes met and darted contagious fire as she puffed and drew in at two cigarettes' length of distance between their faces! Then Madame leaned back on the pillows and puffed away, not vigorously, but with languid and long-drawn enjoyment.

Lionel had seen her smoke so a dozen times before; but this time the action had a special significance for him. She smoked like a woman to the manner born. How impossible to conceive that a person who handled her cigarette like that could be quite so blindly innocent as his charmer pretended to be.

And if not so innocent, then, why, hang it all! what a clever little actress and schemer she was! How admirably she let him see, without one incriminating word ever passing between them, that she knew and approved exactly what he intended.

"So we understand one another?" he asked, leaning over her all intoxicated.

"And Madame, pausing to blow out a long, slow current of thin blue smoke between her pursed-up lips, answered at last, gazing hard once more into the depths of his eyes:

"We understand one another perfectly. Make what arrangements you choose, and take your passage when you like. I am only yours. What day do you fix?"

"For—the ceremony?"

"Yes."

"Saturday."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PLAN IN ACTION.

To finish all needful preparations by Saturday was very hard work indeed; but having plighted his troth thus hastily to lady fair—as fair as pearl powder and crème de Ninon could make her—Mr. Lionel Solomons would have been loath in heart to fail her at a pinch, and he strained every nerve accordingly to complete his arrangements by the date agreed upon.

And yet there was a great deal, a very great deal, to do meanwhile. Let alone certain important but doubtful elements in the case, which Madame Ceriolo in her prudence would not so much as permit to be named before her, other more prosaic and ordinary preparations had still to be performed, as per Act of Parliament in that case made and provided. There was the paternal blessing of the most Reverend Father in God, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to be obtained for this propitious union, on a piece of stamped paper duly sealed and delivered; for Madame Ceriolo, true to her principles to the last, intended to be married with all proper solemnities to Mr. Lionel Solomons, in a building legally set apart for the solemnisation of matrimony, in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England as by law established. No

Registrar's office or hole-and-corner proceedings of doubtful respectability would suit Madame's delicate sense of the becoming in these profound matters; she must be married, if at all, by special license, and according to the rites of that Church in which, as she often remarked, her dear mamma's father had formerly been a distinguished and respected dignitary. To be sure, once tied to Mr. Lionel Solomons by this stringent bond, there might be difficulties in the way of getting rid of him hereafter; but, like a wise woman, Madame resolved to take short views and chance them. It's better to be decently married even to a man you mean to suck dry and desert when completely drained, than to create a scandal. A separation between married folks is nowadays almost fashionable, and certainly not under the ban of the omnipotent Mrs. Grundy. And who knows what becomes of a beggared man in Buenos Ayres? Madame Ceriolo trusted to the noble modern principle of natural selection to improve Mr. Lionel shortly off the face of the earth in those remote parts; and at any rate she felt sure she was doing the very best possible for herself at present in marrying him.

Mr. Lionel, for his part, showed unwonted energy in getting everything ready beforehand for that eventful Saturday. After procuring his license, and securing his berth, and engaging his parson, and making his way in every respect clear before him, he ran down, at last, on the Thursday of that eventful week to Hillborough. Everything depended now on the success of his visit. If he could succeed in what he wanted, all would be well; if not, he would have the mortification and chagrin on Saturday of confessing to the Ceriolo a complete fiasco.

On the way down, the South-Eastern Railway Company's suburban train, making its wonted pace, gave Mr. Lionel in his comfortable smoking compartment ample time for meditation and reflection. And Mr. Lionel, turning all things quietly over with himself, came to the conclusion, in cold blood, that after all he was doing the very best thing for himself in thus anticipating his uncle's testamentary dispositions. Mr. Solomons the elder had frequently explained to him that all the money he had ground out of the Gascoynes and all his other clients by slow process was intended in the end, wholly and solely, for Mr. Lionel's own personal use and benefit.

"It's all for your sake I do it, Leo," Mr. Solomons had said to him deprecatingly more than once. "It's all for you that I slave and hoard and wear myself out without getting any reasonable return in life for it."

And in a certain sense Mr. Lionel knew that was true. His uncle made and hoarded money, to be sure, because to make and hoard money was the instinct of his kind; but Mr. Lionel was the conscious end in view for which as immediate object he made and hoarded it.

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"As Lionel approached, Madame Ceriolo held out both her hands in welcome."

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Still, Mr. Lionel reflected to himself in his unprejudiced way, what was the good of money to a man of fifty? And if Uncle Judah went on living for ever, as one might expect, in spite of his heart (for creaking doors last long), he, Lionel, would be certainly fifty or thereabouts before he had the slightest chance of touching one penny of it. It was absurd of a man to toil and slave for his nephew's sake and then keep that nephew out of his own indefinitely. Mr. Lionel was prepared to relieve Uncle Judah from the onus of that illogical and untenable situation: he was prepared to carry out his uncle's implied desire in a manner more intelligent and more directly sensible than his uncle contemplated.

At any time of his life, indeed, he would have thought the same; he had often thought it before, though he had never dared to act upon it. But the great use of a woman in this world is that she supplies an efficient stimulus to action. Madame Ceriolo's clever and well-directed hints had rendered actual these potential impulses of Lionel's. She had urged him forward to do as he thought; to take Time by the forelock, and realise at once his uncle's savings. He was prepared now to discount his future fortune—at a modest percentage; to take at once what would in any case be his on his uncle's death for an immediate inheritance.

At fifty, of what use would it be to himself and his Countess? And what worlds of fun they could get out of it nowadays.

Madame Ceriolo, indeed, had for many weeks been carefully instilling that simple moral by wide generalizations and harmless copybook maxims into his receptive soul; and the seed she sowed had fallen on strictly appropriate soil, and, springing up well, was now to bring forth fruit in vigorous action. A man, Madame had assured him more than once, should wisely plan and boldly execute; and having attained his end, should sit down in peace under his own vine and fig-tree to rest and enjoy himself. None but the brave deserve the fair; and when the brave had risked much for the sake of a Countess in distress, she must be cruel indeed if, after that, she found it in her heart to blame or upbraid him.

So Mr. Lionel sped slowly on his way southward, well satisfied in soul that he was doing the best in the end for himself and his charmer, and little trembling for the success of his vigorous plan of action.

When he reached Hillborough and his uncle's office, he found Mr. Solomons very red in the face with suppressed excitement from a recent passage-at-arms with the local attorney.

"That fellow Wilkie wanted to cheat me out of two and fourpence costs, Leo," Mr. Solomons exclaimed indignantly, in explanation of his ruffled temper and suffused cheeks; "but I wouldn't stand *that*, you know; I've had it out with him fairly, and I don't think

he'll try it on with *me* a second time, the low pettifogging creature."

"It's made you precious pink about the gills, anyway," Mr. Lionel retorted with cheerful sympathy, seating himself lazily in the easy-chair and gazing up at his uncle's red face and rotund figure.

And, indeed, Mr. Solomons was very flushed—flushed, his nephew observed, with a certain deep blue lividness around the lips and eyes which often indicates the later stages of heart-disease. Certain qualms of conscience rose that moment in Mr. Lionel's soul. Was he going to render himself liable to criminal proceedings, then, all for nothing? If he waited a few weeks, or months, or seasons, would the pear drop ripe from the branch of its own accord? Was he anticipating Nature dangerously when, if he held on in quiet a little longer, Nature herself would bring him his inheritance? These were practical questions that Mr. Lionel's conscience could readily understand, while on more abstract planes, perhaps, it would have been deaf as an adder. Uncle Judah's heart was clearly getting very much the worse for wear. He might pop off any day. Why seek to get by foul means what would be his in time by fair, if only he cared to watch and wait for it.

Pahaw! It was too late for such squeamishness now. With the Archbishop of Canterbury's blessing in his desk, and the Royal Mail Steam Company's receipt for berths per steamship *Dom Pedro* to Buenos Ayres direct in his trousers-pocket, he couldn't turn back at the eleventh hour and await contingencies. Threatened men live long. It's no good counting upon heart-disease; the very worst hearts go beating on for years and years with most annoying regularity. Besides, what would Marie say if he returned to town and told her lamely that his plans had fallen through, and that he must decline to marry her, as per agreement arranged on Saturday morning? When you've made up your mind to wed the charmer who has enslaved your heart, at the week's end, you can't put her off on Thursday afternoon at two days' notice. Come what might now, he must pull this thing through. He must carry out his plan as settled upon at all hazard.

"I'm glad you've come, though, Leo," Mr. Solomons replied, putting his necktie straight and endeavouring to compose his ruffled temper. "I've a great many things I want to talk over with you. I'd like your advice about sundry securities I hold in my hands. Especially as to selling those Central Southern Railway Debentures."

Mr. Lionel's eyes glistened as his uncle rose ten minutes later, after some further parley on business matters, and went over to the safe where the papers which represented his wealth were duly pigeon-holed. How pat! How opportune! He had fallen on his feet indeed: this was precisely the exact chance he needed.

Mr. Solomons drew out the various securities one by one, and discussed with loving cadences their different values.

"All yours, all yours, Leo, my dear," he murmured more than once, as he fingered them gingerly. "You'll be a rich man, Leo, when you come into your own. Gas and Coke Company's A's yield 12 per cent. to original investors, of which I was one. Twelve per cent. is very good interest as times go nowadays on that class of security; excellent interest. No risk; no difficulty; nothing to do but to sit in your easy-chair, with your legs in the air, and draw your dividends. Not my style of business, you know, Leo; too slow for me. I like something that gives me good returns and close pickings, and some fun for one's money; but for your sake, my dear boy, I like to have a little reserve-fund put away safely. It's better than all these speculative investments 'ter all, Leo."

"Certainly," Mr. Lionel assented with promptitude. "Something that can be called in and realized at any moment. Something one can turn into ready cash on the open Stock Exchange whenever it's needed. Whereas, with most of your money-lending transactions, you see, you never know where you are—like that beastly Gascoyne business, for example. Money sunk in a hole, that's what I call it."

"What's that?" Mr. Solomons interposed sharply, looking round over his shoulder, alarmed at the sound of those ominous words, "realised at any moment." "Money sunk in a hole! Nothing of the sort, I give you my word, Leo. Here's the papers all as straight and business-like as possible; and he's paying interest monthly; he's paying interest at the rate of twenty per cent. per annum with the greatest regularity. Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart., is an honourable party."

Mr. Lionel continued to turn over the bonds, and noted carefully where each was pigeon-holed. "You haven't had these out," he said with a casual air, observing the dust upon them, "since I was down here last. I see they're just as I put them back myself last time."

"Well, I don't go to the safe, not twice in a twelvemonth, except when coupons fall due," his uncle answered unconcerned, as he fingered once more the Gascoyne notes of hand with that loving, lingering touch of his. "It's best not to meddle with these things too often, Leo. They might get lying about loose, and be mislaid or stolen."

"Quite so," Mr. Lionel answered dryly, retreating to a seat, and running his fat hand easily through his oily locks while he regarded the safe from afar on his chair in the corner with profound interest. It suited his game, in fact, that Mr. Solomons should visit it as seldom as possible. Suppose by any chance certain securities should happen to be mislaid

in the course of the next week or so—now, for example—it might be Christmas or thereabouts before Mr. Solomons so much as even missed them.

As they loitered about and talked over the question of the Central Southern Debentures, Mr. Solomons' boy from the office below poked his head into the room and announced briefly:

"Mr. Barr to see you, sir."

"I must run down, Leo," Mr. Solomons said, glancing about him with a hasty eye at the bonds and debentures. "Barr and Wilkie again! If ever there was a troublesome set of men on earth, it's country attorneys. Just put these things back into the safe, there's a good fellow, and turn the key on them. The combination's 'Lionel.' It's all yours, you see; all yours, my boy; so I open and shut the lock with your name for a key, Leo."

And he gave an affectionate glance at the oleaginous young man (who sat tilting his chair) as he retreated hurriedly towards the door and the staircase.

Thus providentially left to himself in full possession, Mr. Lionel Solomons could hardly refrain from bursting out at once into a hearty laugh. It was too funny! Did there ever live on earth such a precious old fool as his uncle Judah? "It's all yours, you see!" Ha, ha, the humour of it! He should just think it was, more literally now than Uncle Judah intended. And he opened the safe to the word "Lionel!" Such innocence deserved to be severely fleeced. It positively deserved. A man who had reached his uncle Judah's years ought surely to know better than leave anybody whatsoever—friend or foe—face to face alone with those convertible securities.

When Mr. Lionel Solomons came down to Hillborough, it had been his intention to spend the whole of that night under the avuncular roof; to possess himself of the avuncular keys and combination; and to rife that safe in fear and trembling in the small hours of the morning, when he meant to rise on the plea of catching the first train to London. But fate and that old fool had combined to put things far more easily into his power for a moment. All he had to do was to place such bonds and securities as were most easily negotiable in his own pocket-book, to stick the worthless Gascoyne notes of hand, as too cheap for robbing, in their accustomed pigeon-hole, to lock the safe to a different combination (which would render immediate detection somewhat less probable), and return the keys with the smiling face of innocence to his respected relation. And as Mr. Lionel was not without a touch of grim humour in his composition, he chose for the combination by which alone the safe could next be opened the one significant word, "Idiot."

"If he finds that out," the dutiful nephew chuckled to himself, merrily, "why, all I can say is, he'll be a great deal less of one than ever I take him to be."

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When Mr. Solomons once more reappeared upon the scene, flushed again with contention with his natural enemies, the attorneys, Mr. Lionel handed him back his bunch of keys with perfect sangfroid, and merely observed with a gentle smile of superior compassion:

"I wouldn't get rid of those Central Southern yet awhile, if I were you. The tightness won't last. I don't believe in these 'bearing' operations. They're bound to rise later, with the half-yearly dividend."

And as Mr. Lionel went back to town that same afternoon in high good-humour, cigarette in mouth and flower in buttonhole, he carried with him a considerable sum in stocks and shares of the most marketable character, every one of which could be readily turned into gold or notes before the sailing of the *Dom Pedro* on Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE TRACK OF THE ROBBER.

FIVE days later Paul Gascoyne was sitting at his desk in the lodgings of Gower Street, working away with all his might at a clever middle for an evening newspaper. Paul was distinctly successful in what the trade technically knows as middles; he had conquered the peculiarities of style and matter that go to make up that singular literary product, and he had now invented a *genre* of his own which was greatly appreciated by novelty-loving editors. He had just finished an amusing little diatribe against the ladylike gentlemen who go in for fads in the House of Commons, and was polishing up his manuscript by strengthening his verbs and crispifying his adjectives, when a loud knock at the door disturbed the even flow of his rounded periods; and before he had even time to say "Come in," the door opened of itself, and Mr. Solomons in person stood looming large before him, utterly breathless.

At first sight Paul was fairly taken aback by Mr. Solomon's deep and peculiar colour. To be sure, the young man was accustomed to seeing his old friend and creditor red enough in the face, or even blue; but he had never before seen him of such a bright cerulean tint as at that moment; and the blueness and breathlessness both equally frightened him.

"Take a chair, Mr. Solomons," he broke out, starting up in surprise; but almost before the words were well out of his mouth Mr. Solomons had sunk exhausted of his own accord on the sofa. He tried to speak, but words clearly failed him. Only an inarticulate gurgling gave vent to his emotion. It was plain some terrible event had disturbed his equanimity. Paul bustled about, hardly knowing what to do, but with a vague idea that brandy-and-water administered cold might, perhaps, best meet the exigencies of the situation.

After a minute or two a very strong dose of

brandy seemed to restore Mr. Solomons to comparative tranquillity, though he was still undeniably very much agitated. As soon as he could gasp out a few broken words, however, he seized his young friend's hand in his own, and ejaculated in an almost inaudible voice:

"It's not for myself, Sir Paul, it's not for myself I mind so much—though even that's terrible—but how can I ever have the courage to break it to Leo?"

"To break what, Mr. Solomons?" Paul asked, bewildered. "What's the matter? What's happened? Sit quiet awhile, and then tell me shortly."

"I can't sit quiet," Mr. Solomons answered, rising and pacing the room with a wavering step and panting lungs; "I can't sit quiet when, perhaps, the thief's this very minute getting rid of my valuable securities. Leo always told me I should be robbed; he always told me so, but I never listened to him. And now, poor boy, he's beggared—beggared!"

"Has something been stolen, then?" Paul ventured to suggest tentatively.

"Something!" Mr. Solomons echoed, laying stress with profound emotion on that most inadequate dissyllable, "something: everything! Every penny on earth I've got to bless myself almost—except what's out; and Leo, poor Leo, he's left without anything."

"You don't mean to say so!" Paul exclaimed, surprised, and not knowing exactly how else to express his sympathy.

"Yes," Mr. Solomons continued, seizing the young man's hand once more, and wringing it in his despair; "Paul, Paul—I beg pardon, Sir Paul, I mean, but this loss has taken me back at once to old times—my poor boy's ruined, irretrievably ruined. Unless we can catch the thief, that is to say. And I ought to be after him this minute; I ought to be at Scotland Yard, giving notice to the police, and down in Capel Court to warn the brokers. But I couldn't, I couldn't. I hadn't strength or breath left to do it. I had to come here. First to tell you the truth, and to get you to go with me to interview these people. If Leo'd been in town, I'd have gone straight off, of course, to Leo. But he started for his holiday to Switzerland on Saturday, and I don't know where to telegraph to him, even, for he hadn't decided what route he would take when I last saw him."

"How did it happen?" Paul asked, trying to press Mr. Solomons into a chair once more. "And how much has been stolen?"

"My safe's been rifled!" Mr. Solomons went on with exceeding vehemence, going a livid hue in the face once more. "It's been gutted down, every bond that was in it—all negotiable—bonds payable to bearer—everything but your own notes of hand, Sir Paul, and those the thief left only because he couldn't easily get rid of them in London."

"And when did all this happen?" Paul inquired, aghast.

"It couldn't have been earlier than Thursday last," Mr. Solomons replied, still gasping for breath. "On Thursday Leo came down to see me and tell me about his plans for his holiday, and I wanted to consult him about the Central Southern Debentures, which they've been trying to 'bear' so persistently of late; so I went to my safe—I don't often go to that safe except on special business—and took out all my bonds and securities, and they were all right then. Leo and I both saw them and went over them; and I said to Leo, 'This is all yours, my boy—all yours in the end, you know,' and now he's beggared! Oh, however shall I have the face to tell him?"

"But when did you find it out?" Paul asked, still as wholly unsuspecting of the true state of affairs as Mr. Solomons himself, and feeling profoundly for the old man's distress. For it isn't a small matter, whoever you may be, to lose at one blow the whole savings of a lifetime.

"This morning," Mr. Solomons answered, wiping his beaded brow with his big silk pocket-handkerchief—"this very morning. Do you think I'd have let a night pass, Sir Paul, without getting on his track? When once I'd discovered it, do you think I'd have let him get all that start for nothing? Oh no, the rascal—the mean, thieving villain! If I catch him, he shall have the worst the law can give. He shall have fourteen years—I wish it was life. I wish we had the good old hanging days back again, I do; he should swing for it then! I should like to see him swinging! To think he should try to beggar my poor dear Leo!"

And then, by various jerky and inarticulate stages, Mr. Solomons slowly explained to Paul the manner of the discovery: how he had decided, after all, in view of suspicious rumours afloat about the safety of a tunnel, to sell the Central Southern Debentures at 87-8ths, in spite of Leo; how he had gone to the safe and tried his familiar combination, "Lionel"; how the key had refused to answer to the word; how, in his perplexity, he had called in a smith to force the lock open by fire and arms, which, apparently, was Mr. Solomons' own perversion of *vi et armis*, and how at last, when he succeeded, he found the pigeon-holes bare, and nothing left but Paul's own notes of hand for money lent and interest. "So, unless I find him, Sir Paul," the old man cried piteously, wringing his hands in despair, and growing bluer and bluer in the face than ever, "I shall have nothing left but what little's out and what you can pay me off; and I don't want to be a burden to you—I don't want to be a burden."

"We must go down to Scotland Yard at once and hunt up the thief," Paul replied resolutely; "and we must go and stop the bonds before another hour's over."

"But he may have sold them already," Mr. Solomons cried with a despondent face. "They were there on Thursday, I know, but how soon after that he carried them off I haven't the very slightest notion. They were all negotiable—every one negotiable; and he may have cleared off with the money or the bonds by this time to Berlin or Vienna."

"You suspect nobody?" Paul asked, drawing on his boots to go down to Scotland Yard.

"I've nobody to suspect," Mr. Solomons answered with a profound sigh. "Except Leo and myself, nobody ever had access to or went near that safe. Nobody knew the combination to open it. But whoever did it," and here Mr. Solomons' lips grew positively black, and his cheek darkened, "he had the impudence to set the combination wrong, and the word he set it to was 'Idiot,' if you'll believe it. He not only robbed me, but he insulted me as well. He took the trouble to lock the door of the safe to the deliberately insolent word 'Idiot.'"

"That's very curious," Paul said. "He must have had time to waste if he could think of doing that. A midnight thief would have snatched the bonds and left the safe open."

"No," Mr. Solomons answered with decision and with prompt business insight, "he wouldn't have done that; for then I'd have known I'd been robbed at once, and I'd have come up to town by the very next train and prevented his negotiating. The man that took them would want to sell them. It all depends upon whether he's had time for managing that. They're securities to bearer that can pass from hand to hand like a five-pound note. If he took them Friday, he'd Saturday and Monday. If he took them Saturday, he'd Monday and that's all. But, then, we can't tell where he's been likely to sell them. Some of 'em he could sell in Paris or in Liverpool as easy as in London; and from Liverpool he could clear out at once to America."

They went down the stairs even as he spoke to Mr. Solomons' hansom, which was waiting at the door.

"It's strange you can't think of any likely person to have done it," Paul said as they got into it.

"Ah, if Leo were in town," Mr. Solomons exclaimed, with much dejection, "he'd soon hunt 'em up! Leo's so smart. He'd spot the thief like one o'clock. But he's gone on his holiday, and I can't tell where to find him. Sir Paul, I wouldn't mind so much if it was only for myself, but how can I ever tell Leo? How can I break it to Leo?"

And Paul, reflecting silently to himself, was forced to admit that the revelation would double-put a severe strain upon Mr. Lionel Solomons' family affection.

At Scotland Yard they met with immediate and respectful attention—an attention due in part, perhaps, to the magnitude of the loss, for bonds to a very considerable amount were

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in question, but largely also, no doubt, to that unobtrusive visiting-card, which announced the younger and more retiring of the two complainants as "Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart." The law, to be sure, as we all know, is no respecter of persons; but hardly anyone would ever find that out in modern England from the way it is administered.

Before the end of the afternoon they had gone with a detective round Capel Court and the stockbroking quarter generally, and had succeeded in discovering in a single unimportant case what disposition had been made of one of the missing securities. By a miracle of skill, the detective had slowly tracked down a small bond for £200 to a dark young man, close-shaven and muffled, with long lank hair too light for his complexion, who seemed thoroughly well up in the ways of the City, and who gave his name as John Howard Lewis. Mr. Lewis had so evidently understood his business, and had offered his bond for sale with such thorough frankness and openness, that nobody at the broker's had for a moment dreamt of suspecting or questioning him. He had preferred to be paid by cheque to bearer—wanting, as he said, the money for an immediate purpose; and this cheque was duly returned as cashed the same day at the London Joint Stock Bank in Prince's Street by Mr. Lewis in person. It hadn't passed through anybody's account, and payment had been taken in Bank of England tens and twenties, the numbers of which were of course duly noted. As a matter of fact, however, this latter precaution was of very little use, for every one of the notes had been changed later in the day (though Mr. Solomons didn't find that fact out till somewhat after) into Bank of France notes and American greenbacks, which were converted back still more recently into English currency, so that almost all trace of the thief was lost. Mr. Solomons had no clue by which he could find him.

"The oddest part of it all," Mr. Solomons remarked to the detective as they travelled back by Metropolitan together to Scotland Yard, "is that this bond was offered for sale on Friday morning."

"It was," the detective answered with cautious reserve. "Well, then, what of that, sir."

"Why, then," Mr. Solomons went on, profoundly puzzled, "the lot must have been stolen on Thursday night, for my nephew and I saw them all quite safe in their place on Thursday."

"They must," the detective answered with dry acquiescence. He was forming his conclusions.

Mr. Solomons moaned and clasped his hands hard between his knees.

"If we catch the rogue," he murmured, "he'll have fourteen years for it."

"Undoubtedly," the detective answered, and ruminated to himself; a clue was working

in his professional brain. The bonds had been abstracted between Mr. Lionel's visit on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning. That narrowed the inquiry to very restricted limits indeed; so Sherrard, the detective, observed to himself inwardly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HUNTED DOWN.

THAT night Mr. Solomons slept at Paul's lodgings.

About seven in the morning, before either of them was up, the detective came once more, all radiant in the face, with important tidings. He asked to see Sir Paul Gascoyne. As soon as Sir Paul came out into the little study and sitting-room to meet him, Mr. Sherrard jerked his head mysteriously towards the door of Mr. Solomons' bedroom, and observed in a voice full of confidential reserve:

"I didn't want too much to upset the old gentleman."

"Have you got a clue?" Paul asked, with profound interest.

And the detective answered with the same mysterious air:

"Yes, we've got a clue—a clue that I think will surprise him a little. But we'll have to travel down to Cornwall, him and me, as quick as we can travel, before we can be sure of it."

"To Cornwall!" Paul repeated, astonished. "You don't mean to say the thief's gone down to Cornwall, of all places in England."

For Nea lived in Cornwall, and hallowed it by her presence. To think that a man who stole bonds and scrip should have the face to take them to the county thus sanctified by Nea!

"Well, no," the detective answered, pointing with his thumb and his head once more in a most significant fashion towards the room where Mr. Solomons was still in unconscious enjoyment of his first slumber for the night; for he had lain awake, tossing and turning, full of his loss, till five in the morning. "He ain't exactly gone there; but we've got to go there ourselves to follow him. The fact of it is, I've come upon a trace. We were working all evening at it—our men from the yard—for we thought, from his taking it all in a cheque to bearer, he was likely to clear out as fast as he could clear; and we've tried to find where he was likely to clear out for."

"And what have you discovered?" Paul asked breathless.

"Well, we tracked our man from the broker's, you see, to a money-changer's in the Strand," the detective responded, still very confidentially. "It was lucky the old gentleman got wind of it all so soon, or we mightn't have been able to track him so easily. After a month or two, of course, the scent mightn't lie. But being as it was only last Friday it

happened, the track was pretty fresh. And we found out, at the changer's, he'd offered two hundred pounds in Bank of England twenties for French notes of a thousand francs. That was all right and straightforward, to be sure. But here's where the funny part of the thing comes in. From the changer's in the Strand, he went straight down to Charing Cross Station, and at the little office thereby, where the cabs drive out, he changed back the French thousands, d'ye see, for Bank of England tens again."

And the detective closed his left eye slowly and reflectively.

"Just to confuse the track, I suppose," Paul put in, by way of eliciting further communication.

"That's it, sir," the detective went on. "You're on it like a bird. He wanted to get a hold of notes that couldn't be tracked. But all the same, we've tracked 'em. It was sharp work to do it, all in one night, but still we tracked 'em. We'd got to do it at once, for fear the fellow should get clean away; so it put us on our mettle. Well, we've tracked 'em at last. We find eight of them notes, balance of passage-money, was paid in on Monday at the Royal Steam Company's offices in the City."

"You don't mean to say so!" Paul exclaimed, much interested. "By whom, and to where, then!"

"By a dark young gentleman, same height and build as Mr. John Howard Lewis, and about the same description as to face and features, but blacker in the hair, and curlier, by what they tell us. And this gentleman had a moustache when he took the tickets first on Tuesday week; but the moustache was shaved off when he paid the balance of the passage-money on Monday. It was twelve at night when he hunted up the clerk who arranged the passage, at his lodgings at Clapham; but he remembered it distinctly, because at first he didn't recognise the gentleman owing to the change in his personal appearance; and then, later, he recollected it was the same face, but close-shaven since he called first time about the berth; so that pretty well fixes it."

"But he paid eighty pounds," Paul said, unsuspecting even so, "if he got rid of eight of them. Where on earth was he going to with a passage-money like that, then?"

"Well, it wasn't all for himself," the detective answered dryly, still eyeing him closely. "It generally ain't. We count upon that, almost. There's mostly a woman at the bottom of all these 'ere embezzlement or robbery cases. The gentleman gave the name of Burton, instead of Lewis, at the Royal Mail Company's offices, and he took two berths for himself and Mrs. Percy Maybank Burton. When a gentleman's got two names at once there's usually something or other to inquire into about him. Often enough he's

got a third, too. Anyhow, the eighty pounds he paid was for balance of passage-money for himself and lady."

"Where to?" Paul asked once more.

"To Buenos Ayres," the detective answered with pardonable pride. "And I thought I'd better tell you first, so as not to make it too great a shock, don't you see, for the poor old gentleman."

"Too great a shock!" Paul repeated, bewildered.

"Well, yes. He mightn't like it, you know. It might sort of upset him."

"To know you've got a clue?" Paul exclaimed, much puzzled.

"Well, not exactly that," the detective answered, gazing at him with a sort of gentle and pitying wonder. "But to hear—that the person has gone off with a lady."

"I don't quite see why," Paul replied vaguely.

The detective seemed amused.

"Oh, well, if you don't see it, perhaps he won't see it either," he went on, smiling. "Of course it ain't no business of mine to object. I'm a public officer, and I've only got to do my duty. I'm going down to Co. wall to try and arrest my man, but I thought, perhaps, you or the old gentleman might like to come down and help me to identify him."

"To identify him?" Paul echoed.

"Well, to secure him, anyhow," the detective answered cautiously. "You see, I've got out a warrant for his apprehension, of course—in different aliases; and we may as well have all the information we can, so as to make quite sure beforehand of our capture. But we must go by the 9.40 from Paddington, anyhow."

"Where to?" Paul inquired, more mystified than ever.

"To Redruth and Helston," the detective replied, coming down to business. "From there we'll have to post to the Lizard, and try to intercept him."

"Oh, I see," Paul said, "you want to stop the steamer?"

The detective nodded.

"That's it," he assented. "He's aboard the *Dom Pedro*, from Southampton for Brazil and Argentine ports. She don't call for mails, unfortunately, at Falmouth; but she may be caught off the Lizard still, if we make haste to stop her. If not, we shall telegraph on to Rio and Buenos Ayres, and an officer'll go out by Lisbon, on the offchance to catch him under Extradition Treaty."

"You settled all that to-night?" Paul asked, amazed at this promptitude.

"Yes; we settled all that in the small hours of the morning. It's a big affair, you see, and that put us on our mettle, and I've come to know if either of you want to go down to the Lizard along of me."

"For whom is the warrant?"

The detective looked hard at him.

"For Percy Maybank Burton," he answered with one eye closed. "You see, that's the only certain name we've got to go upon, though there's an alias to the warrant—alias John Howard Lewis, and others. He gave his name as Burton to the Company, of course, and he's Burton aboard. We didn't get none for the apprehension of the woman. She ain't identified yet; but if the young chap comes off, of course she'll follow him."

"Of course," Paul answered, without much knowing why. For he had no reason on earth for connecting Madame Ceriolo directly or indirectly with the unknown criminal. If he had, perhaps he might have spoken with less of certainty.

"What's up?" Mr. Solomons called out from the passage, putting his head out of the door at the sound of the detective's voice.

The officer, in carefully guarded terms, explained to him in full the existing state of affairs.

Mr. Solomons didn't take long in making up his mind.

"I'll go!" he said briefly. "I'll catch the scoundrel if it's the last thing in this world I ever do. The rascal, to try to rob Leo and me like that! He shall have fourteen years for it, if there's law in England. Hard labour, penal servitude. Only I ain't fit to go down there alone. If I catch him it'll make me so angry to see him, I shall have a bad turn with my heart; I know I shall, to a certainty. But no matter, I'll go. I only wish Leo was in England to go with me."

"Well, he ain't," Mr. Sherrard answered in the same short, sharp tone in which he had answered before; "so, if you mean to come, you must make up your mind to come as you are and get ready instanter."

But if Mr. Solomons had "come as he was" the authorities of the Great Western Railway would have been somewhat surprised at the apparition of a gentleman at Paddington Station in slippers and nightshirt.

Paul considered a moment and looked at the old man. Mr. Solomons was undoubtedly a hale and hearty person in most respects; but his heart was distinctly unfit for the sort of strain that was now being put upon it. Paul had noticed the day before how the arteries in his forehead had bounded with excitement, and then how the veins had swelled with congested blood, as the fit passed over. If he went down to the Lizard alone with the detective and put himself into a fume trying to catch the robber of his bonds, Paul hardly liked to answer for the possible consequences. And, strange as it may sound to say so, the young man had a curious half-filial sentiment lurking somewhere in his heart towards the old Hillborough money-lender. He had never ceased to feel that it was Mr. Solomons who had made him what he was. If it hadn't been for Mr. Solomons, he might still have been lounging about a stable in

Hillborough, instead of writing racy and allusive middles for the *Monday Remembrancer*. He hesitated for an instant to press himself upon his old friend—the third-class fare to Cornwall and back mounts up, I can tell you—but in the end his good nature and gratitude conquered.

"If you care for my company, I'll gladly go with you, Mr. Solomons," he suggested timidly.

Mr. Solomons wrung his young friend's hand with affectionate regard.

"That's very kind of you, Sir Paul," he said; "that's very, very kind of you. I appreciate it, that a gentleman in your position—yes, yes, I know my place," for Paul had made a little deprecatory gesture, "should be so good as to desert his own work and go with me. But if you go, you must let me pay all expenses, for this is my business; and if Leo had been in England, Leo'd have run down with me."

"Well, make haste," the detective said dryly. He had a singularly reticent manner, that detective. "You've no time to lose, gentlemen. Get your things together, and put 'em into a hansom, and we'll drive off at once to Paddington together."

CHAPTER XL.

"CORNWALL TO WIT."

ALL the way down to Redruth and Helston, Paul noticed vaguely that both his fellow-travellers were silent and preoccupied. Mr. Solomons, when he spoke at all, spoke for the most part of Lionel, and of this wicked attempt to deprive him of his patrimony. More than once he took a large folded paper out of his pocket, of very legal aspect, bearing on its face, in most lawyer-like writing, the engrossed legend—"Will of Judah P. Solomons, Gentleman." This interesting document he opened, and showed in part to Paul. It was a cheerful and rather lengthy performance of its own kind, marked by the usual legal contempt for literary style, and the common legal love for most pleonastic redundancy; everything was described in it under at least three alternative nouns, as "all that house, messuage, or tenement"; and everybody was mentioned by every one of his names, titles, and places of residence, whenever he was referred to, with no stops to speak of, but with a graceful sprinkling of that precious word "aforesaid" as a substitute in full for all punctuation. Nevertheless, it set forth in sufficiently succinct terms that the testator, being then of sound state of mind and in possession of all his intellectual faculties as fully as at any period of life, did give and devise to his nephew, Lionel Solomons, gentleman, the whole of his estate, real or personal, in certain specified ways and manners and for his own sole use and benefit. The will further

provided that, in case the said Lionel Solomons, gentleman, should predecease the testator, then and in that case testator gave and devised all his estate aforesaid, real or personal, in trust to the Jewish Board of Guardians of London, to be by them applied to such ends and purposes, in connection with the welfare of the Hebrew population of the Metropolitan Postal District, as might to them seem good in the exercise of their wise and sole discretion.

"It was every penny Leo's, you see," Mr. Solomons repeated many times over with profound emotion—"every penny Leo's. All my life's savings were made for Leo. And to think that rascal should have tried to deprive him of it! Fourteen years he shall have, if there's law in England, Sir Paul. Fourteen years, with hard labour too, if there's law in England."

As for Sherrard the detective—that moody man—he smiled grimly to himself every time Mr. Solomons made these testamentary confidences to his young friend; and once he ventured to remark, with a faintly significant air, that that would be a confounded fine haul of its sort for the Jewish Board of Guardians, if ever they came in for it.

"But they won't," Mr. Solomons answered warmly. "They'll never come in for it. I've only put it there out of a constitutional habit of providing beforehand for any contingency. My heart ain't what it used to be. Any sudden shock now'd bring it up short, like a horse against a hedge he can't take. I just added that reminder to the Board of Guardians to show I never turned my back upon my own people. I'm not one of those Jews afraid and ashamed to be known for Jews. A Christian I may be; a man can't be blamed for changing his religious convictions—on sufficient grounds—but a Hebrew I was born and a Hebrew I'll remain to the end of the chapter. I won't ever turn my back upon my own kith and kindred."

"There's some as does," the detective remarked enigmatically, and relapsed once more into the corner cushion.

It's a long way from Paddington to Helston: but the weariest day comes to an end at last; and in time they reached the distant Cornish borough. It was late at night when they disembarked on the platform, but no time was to be lost; if they wanted to stop the *Dom Pedro* as she passed the Lizard Light, they must drive across at once to the end of the promontory, to arrange signals. So they chartered a carriage without delay at Helston Station, and set out forthwith on their journey across the long, dark moor in solemn silence. They were in no mood for talking, indeed. The day in the train had tired them all, and now they must snatch what sleep they might, against to-morrow's work, in the jolting carriage.

The drive across the tableland of the Lizard

is always, even by day, a wild and lonely one; but on this particular night it was wilder, lonelier and darker than ever. More than once the driver pulled up his horses in the middle of the road, to consider his way, and more than once he got down and walked some yards ahead to see whether by any chance he had missed some familiar landmark. On each such occasion Mr. Solomons' fretfulness and anxiety visibly increased. At last he could stand these frequent interruptions to the continuity of the journey no longer. He put his head out of the window and expostulated warmly.

"What are you waiting like this for, man?" he cried in an angry tone. "Don't you know your way? I declare it's too bad. If you couldn't find the road from Helston to the Lizard you oughtn't to have taken us. There's thousands at stake—thousands of pounds' worth of bonds that rogue has stolen; and if we're not at the Lizard in time to catch him, he may get clean off with them to South America."

The man looked back at his fare with a half-contemptuous glance.

"That's the way of all you London people," he answered gruffly with the stolid Cornish moroseness. "Always a-fault-finding. And yet there's fog enough, they tells me, too, in London!"

"Fog!" Mr. Solomons ejaculated, catching hastily at his meaning with the quickened perception that comes at any great critical moment of life.

"Ay, fog," the man answered. "Lizard fog, they calls it. Fog that thick you can't hardly see your hand before you. It's bad enough driving over Helston Moor dark nights any time; but with fog like this it's a toss up if ever we get at all to Lizard Town."

Mr. Solomons gazed out blankly into the black night. He saw it at a glance. It was all too true. A finger-post stood by the roadside opposite, but even with the light from the carriage-lamp falling full upon it, he could hardly make out its shape, far less its lettering, through the dim, misty shroud that intervened between him and the roadside. He flung himself back on the cushions with a groan of despair.

"If we go on at this snail's pace," he cried in the bitterness of his heart, "we shall never reach there in time to stop her. That thief 'll get off clear with the bonds to South America, and Leo 'll be ruined."

The driver laughed again in the old man's face—the hard, dry, sardonic Cornish laugh.

"That's the way of you London people," he repeated once more, with the critical frankness and openness of his race. "Thinks you knows everything, and ain't got no common gumption about anything anyhow! Why, who supposes the steamer can get past the Lizard in a fog like this, when we can't so much as find our way on the open road across the moor by dry

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land from Helston. What delays us'll delay her. She'll anchor till morning, and wait for it to clear, that's what she'll do, unless she bears away out to sea southward. She couldn't get past the lighthouse in this sort of weather, could she?"

"No—couldn't she, though?" Mr. Solomons cried, appeased and relieved. "You think she'll wait till the fog lifts in the morning?"

"She's bound to," the driver answered confidently, "if she don't want to go to pieces on Cadgwith Cliffs, or on the rocks over yonder by the church at St. Ruan's. There's many of 'em as has gone to pieces in a fog nigh Cadgwith, I tell you. Ay, and many a ship as has drowned them by the dozen, so as the Cadgwith men have made fortunes time and again out of the salvage. 'God's providence is my inheritance'—that's the motto of the Cadgwith men ever since the days when their fathers was wreckers." And the driver laughed to himself a sullen, hard laugh, indicative of thorough appreciation of the grimly humorous view of Providence embodied in the local coastwise proverb.

A strange shudder passed through Mr. Solomons' massive frame.

"Gone to pieces in a fog!" he repeated. "You don't mean that! And drowned there, too! That'd be worse than all. He might go down with the bonds in his case! And, anyhow, he'd do us out of the fourteen years' imprisonment."

The detective glanced over at Paul with a curious look, whose exact meaning Paul was at a loss to determine.

"If he drowns!"

"If he drowns," the officer said, in that restrained tone he had so often adopted, "that's the hand of God. The hand of God, you see, cancels and overrides any magistrate's warrant."

Mr. Solomons clenched his fist hard, and looked blankly in front of him.

"All the same," he said fiercely, with long-smouldering indignation, "I don't want to lose all my precious bonds, and I don't want the fellow to get off his fourteen years' imprisonment."

"Whoever he may be?" the detective murmured tentatively.

"Whoever he may be," Mr. Solomons assented, with angry vehemence. "I'm an honest man. I've worked hard for my money. Why should I and my nephew be beggared by anyone?"

They drove on still through the gloom and mist, and gradually felt their way by stumbling steps across the great open moor towards the point of the Lizard. As they drew nearer and nearer they could hear the fog-horn at the lighthouse blowing loudly now and at frequent intervals, and bells were ringing, and strange noises along the coast resounded hoarsely. But all around was black as midnight; and when at last they reached the Lizard Light-

house, even the great electric light itself hardly traversed the gloom or shed a faint ray at the base of its own tall and dripping pedestal.

Mr. Solomons bustled out, and hurriedly informed the coastguardman at the preventive station of the nature of their errand. The coastguardman shook his head gravely.

"Not to-night," he said. "This ain't no time for going to signal a ship to stop, no matter for what. You can put out a boat and try to meet her if you like; but it ain't likely in such weather you'd find her. More chance to be run down yourself unbeknown by her and drowned without her even so much as sighting you."

"She hasn't gone by yet?" Mr. Solomons asked, eagerly.

"No, she ain't gone by yet," the coastguardman replied. "But she's expected every minute. She'd signal by gun or fog-horn, I take it. Though we ain't heard nothing of her so far, to be sure. Most likely she's scounded and found herself in shoal water, and so she's dropped anchor and laid by till morning."

"Then the best thing for us to do," Paul suggested, "is to turn in quietly at the hotel for the night, and see whether we can find her early to-morrow."

To this plan of action, however, neither Mr. Solomons nor the detective would at all consent. They insisted upon remaining about within call of the lighthouse, on the off chance of the *Dom Pedro* appearing from minute to minute. One of them felt constrained by duty, the other by animosity and love of money, and neither would yield one jot or tittle of his just pretensions. So Paul was fain to give way to their combined authority at last, and walk up and down in that damp night-fog by the edge of the cliffs that line round the great promontory.

So weird or impressive a sheet of fog Paul had never seen before in his life. It was partly the place, partly the time, but partly, also, the intense thickness of that dense Channel sea-mist that enthralled his fancy. He descended by himself slowly, with shambling steps, along the steep path that leads down to the water's edge at the very point of the Lizard. To render it more visible on dark nights, the coastguardmen have whitewashed the dark patches of rock by the side, and piled up along the jagged pinnacles little heaps, or cairns, of white pebbles. But even so aided, it was with difficulty that Paul could pick his way along the uncertain path, especially as in parts it was wet with spray and slimy with the evaporations of salt sea-water.

There was little wind, as is usually the case in foggy weather, but the long Atlantic groundswell nevertheless made big breakers on the abrupt rocks; and the thunder of the waves, as they surged and burst below among the unseen caves and dark cliffs of the promontory,

had a peculiarly wild and solemn sound on that black night, now just merging towards the first cold gray of morning.

Paul was afraid to trust himself within sight of the waves, not knowing how near it might be safe to approach; but he sat for awhile, alone in the damp darkness, on the narrow ledge that seemed to overhang the hoarse chorus of breakers beneath, and listened with a certain strange poetic thrill to the thunderous music of the Atlantic below him.

And ever and anon, above the noise of the waves, the dull, droning voice of the gigantic fog-horn broke in upon the current of his solemn reverie.

It was a night to pity men at sea.

All at once a sudden flash to eastward, hardly descried through the fog, seemed to illumine for a second, in a haze of light, the mist around him. Next instant a boom sounded loud in his ears—the boom of a great gun, as if fired point-blank towards him.

How near it might be, Paul could hardly guess; but he was conscious at the same time of the odour of gunpowder strong in his nostrils, while the choking sensation that accompanies great closeness to a big explosion almost unnerved him, and rendered him giddy for a moment. He rose in alarm at the shock, but his feet failed him. He had hardly the power left to scale the rocks once more by the white-washed path. The concussion and the foul air had well-nigh stupefied him.

Nevertheless, as he mounted to the lighthouse again he was intuitively aware of what was happening close by. Vague noises and feelings seemed to press the truth on him as if by instinct.

A great ship was in danger—in pressing danger—on the rocks of the Lizard.

She had come across the breakers unawares in a dense fog, and had fired her gun for a signal almost point-blank in Paul's very face. Had he not by good-luck been turned the other way, and with his eyes half shut dreamily, as he listened to the thunder of those long Atlantic waves and the moaning of the fog-horn, it would certainly have blinded him.

And now, for all Paul knew to the contrary, the big ship was going to pieces on the jagged rocks beneath him there.

Then, with a second flash of intuition it came home to him more fully, as he recovered his senses from the sudden shock, that this was in all probability the watched-for *Dom Pedro*—with the thief on board her.

CHAPTER XII.

A RESCUE.

CLIMBING back hurriedly, but cautiously, to the top, Paul groped his way through the thick mist to the lighthouse, where all was already bustle and confusion. The first gray light of

dawn was beginning to struggle faintly through the dense fog, and swirling wreaths of vapour grew vaguely visible in the direction of the cliff, whither people were feeling their way with outstretched arms, and much noise of preparation, towards the cove and the lifeboat.

"What's the matter?" Paul asked one rough sailor-looking man, whom he followed towards the house where the lifeboat was harboured.

"Matter?" the man answered. "Why salvage, that's what it is. Vessel gone ashore on Long Men Rocks. Steamer, most likely. Brazil packet from Southampton, I take it. Very good salvage."

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. The descendant of the wreckers was thinking only of his own inheritance.

Paul hurried on in the man's footsteps till he reached the shore. There, through the vague gloom, he saw Mr. Solomons and the detective already before him. The sailors were pushing out the lifeboat over the short shingle beach, and fishermen about were putting off small rowing-craft to take their share in the expected harvest of salvage.

Before he knew exactly how it was all happening, he found himself seated in one of the small boats, with Mr. Solomons and the detective, while two sturdy fishermen were pushing them seaward, through that tremendous surf that seemed certain to swamp them with its huge curling breakers.

For a minute or two the waves broke in upon them, drenching them through and through with showers of spray, and half filling the boat. Then the fishermen, finding at last the long-looked-for opportunity, pushed her successfully off on a retiring wave, and got her safe out to sea beyond the reach of the great curving billows. Once well afloat, they found the sea itself comparatively smooth, though heaving and tossing with a long glassy swell, whose ups and downs were far deeper in their way than anything that Paul had ever before experienced. The boatmen rowed on in the wake of the lifeboat, through the fog and darkness, towards the sound of a bell that rang with a long, irregular, rocking movement some hundred yards or so southward of them. Paul knew instinctively, somehow, that no one was ringing the bell. It was the rise and fall of the vessel as she dashed helplessly upon the rocks that made that unearthly rhythm; she was tolling her own knell as the breakers broke her upon the jagged and water-worn pinnacles of the Lizard.

As they approached nearer, little more was visible. It added to the weird horror and awe of the tragedy, indeed, that nothing could be seen of it. They only knew by inference that a great ship was being foundered and ground to pieces by some invisible force within a few yards of them.

But the breakers themselves and the rocks

were faintly in evidence. Paul could make out through the gloom some sunken stacks of serpentine, round whose crest the big waves made vast curling swoops, and boiled and roared in hideous, whirling eddies. The ship had struck from the opposite side, and the boatmen refused to row any nearer; indeed, even where they now held her off, pressing with all their might on the bending oars, the danger of grounding was very considerable. No boat could possibly live in that wild surf upon those broken granite points. If once a wave should catch them on its summit and carry them on to the rocks, all would be up; no human aid could ever avail to save them.

And then, as they held off there, keeping carefully to the trough of the waves, and listening to the cries and shouts that came over to them through the fog, and hearing the dull grating of the hull as it scraped along the rock with each lifting billow, a louder voice than any rose distinct across the waves—the voice of a ship's officer calling out in wild tones of horror, "She's parting amidships."

And so she was! Next moment they saw upon the breakers close by great fragments of wreck and bits of floating board. There could be no doubt the voice had cried out what was true. A loud snap rent the air; a crash of breaking, the shrieks and screams redoubled in intensity, and the boatmen holding the boat away, out of reach of the wash, called out aloud, "She's gone to pieces that time. I heard her crack. Row round the other way, Jim, and help pick up the passengers."

"Are they drowning?" Mr. Solomons cried, with a face of terrible relentlessness.

"They're drowning, no doubt," the man answered, with the stolid matter-of-fact air of the hardened seaman. "They can't many of 'em live in such a sea as that is. Anywhere else they wouldn't come to much hurt this calm weather—leastways, if they could swim; but the breakers on the Long Men Rocks is always terrible. Why, that's where the East Indiaman went to pieces twelve years ago come Christmas, don't you mind, Jimmy?"

"I hope he won't drown," Mr. Solomons cried savagely, "and balk me of justice! I hope he won't die till I've had my fourteen years out of him!"

The men were rowing their hardest now, and, as Paul could judge by the sounds growing gradually fainter, away from the wreck and the reef of rocks, so as to turn their flank sideways and come in upon them from the open. For nearly ten minutes they rowed on in silence as hard as arms and legs could row, Mr. Solomons sitting grim and unmoved in the stern, while the detective eyed him ever with a strange suspicious side-glance. At the end of that time, the fog lifted a little, a very little, and Paul saw they were skirting the long ridge of rocks, marked some twenty yards off by their white line of breakers.

Presently they saw other boats about—boats

whose occupants were engaged in peering into the water in search of black objects bobbing up and down in it, which they lunged at with boat-hooks. And then, with sudden realization of the whole horror of the thing, Paul recognised with a start that these were human bodies.

In another minute there loomed dimly ahead some dozen yards or so off a great dark mass, moving wildly about among the white sheets of foam; and Paul saw with another terrible shock of awe that it was half the broken hull of a huge ocean-going steamer. She had parted amidships, and one half had sunk already in the deeper water. The other half, yet dashing wildly on the rocks, hung together still upon the reefs in front of them.

At the same moment a small black body went floating past, like the others they had seen the neighbouring boatmen lunge at. As it passed them it rose spasmodically to the surface, and two arms were flung up wildly into the air. Through the gray haze of morning Paul could recognise them at once as a woman's arms—a woman's arms plump and smooth and white-skinned.

He jumped up, and seizing a loose car in his hands, held it hastily out towards the despairing creature. But even as he did so, the long swell carried her away from his sight into the deep mist beyond, where she disappeared, shrieking. They rowed with all speed towards the spot where she had disappeared, and once more came in sight of the woman. By this time another boat had found her, and was pulling her in. With frantic struggles for life she clutched the gunwale, and climbed over, with the aid of the men's arms, on to the boat's seat. Then she turned round, with her wet dressing-gown dripping around her, and in a shrill voice of horror she cried out to the sailors, "Go ashore, go ashore! I shall perish of cold here!"

For a second the voice rang with curious familiarity in Paul's ear, but he failed at first to recognise the pale and draggled creature round whose shoulders one of the fishermen was wrapping, with much care, his own rough pilot-coat. Next instant, with a sudden burst of recollection, the voice came back to him in all its well-know sharpness.

"Why, it's Madame Cerlolo!" he cried, unable to restrain his surprise and wonder.

Madame turned round quick as lightning at the sound of her own name and the unexpected recognition. She remembered at once both voice and face. She gave a little start.

"What! Mr. Gascoyne!" she cried, forgetting for the moment Paul's new-made dignity. Then suddenly her eyes fell on Mr. Solomons' stern and inflexible figure sitting bolt upright on the seat behind. She knew that face at once, though she had never seen it before. It answered exactly to the photograph Mr. Lionel had shown her of his unconscionable uncle.

She read the whole history of the pursuit at a glance. It was old Cento-Cento, come after his dollars.

In the twinkling of an eye she had made up her mind how to behave under the circumstances. Dupe, not accomplice, was now her winning card. Still shivering with cold and half dead with terror, she yet stretched out her arms towards the grim old man, who sat there immovable, taking hardly any notice of the drowning people, and called out in a voice full of earnest gratitude:

"Why, it's him, to be sure! It's Leo's uncle! He's come out with a boat to save me and Leo."

Like a flash of lightning Paul read the whole truth. It was Lionel, then, who had stolen the bonds from the safe! It was Lionel who was running away on board the *Dom Pedro*!

He glanced at the detective, and caught his eye inquiringly. The detective nodded, with that strange smile once more. Instinctively the full horror of the situation dawned at once upon his mind. Mr. Solomons was hunting down to the very death his own cherished nephew. And the detective was there to arrest Mr. Lionel.

He looked at the old usurer in a perfect paroxysm of pity. How on earth would he bear up against this blinding and staggering disillusionment? But a moment's glance showed him that Mr. Solomons hadn't even yet grasped the real situation. He had merely leaned forward eagerly at the sound of his nephew's name, and repeated in a startled and puzzled, but by no means horrified tone:

"Yes, I'm Leo's uncle. Tell me, what do you know or mean about Leo?"

Madame Ceriolo hardly felt sure on the spur of the moment what to answer. It would suit her book better now, all things considered, that Mr. Lionel should go down, with his possibly incriminating evidence on his soul, and that she should be able to pose as one more victim of his selfish criminality. But the position was too strong for her. She felt she must at all risks keep up appearances. So she wrapped the pilot-coat around her tightly with a shudder of alarm (it was immensely easy to get up a shudder in that cold morning air, and with her thin clothes dripping), and cried out in wild tones of impassioned agony:

"Yes, Leo's on board. Leo, my Leo! On the rocks there ahead. Oh, save him, save him!"

"Leo on board!" Mr. Solomons answered, clapping his hand to his forehead, and letting his jaw drop slowly with a stare of astonishment. His look was dazed and bewildered now. "Leo on board!" he repeated, with a terrible wave of doubt passing over his face. Then his mouth closed up again. "No, no!" he went on, fixedly, "Leo couldn't be on

board. It's a lie! It's a lie! He's gone to Switzerland."

Madame Ceriolo gazed at him—a childlike and trustful woman.

"Not to Switzerland," she said, for she felt certain now that all must come out; "he'd taken his ticket at the last moment for Buenos Ayres."

At the word, Mr. Solomons jumped up in the boat with such energy that he almost sent it off its balance.

"For Buenos Ayres!" he cried. "You don't say that! Well done, well done—well done, indeed, Leo! He's the very smartest chap in all London, that boy! Don't you see it, Sir Paul? Don't you see his game? He'd tracked the bonds before us, and was on the trail of the robber!"

"At any rate," Paul cried, looking towards the detective for support, "our first business now must be to go out and save him."

Mr. Solomons stood still in the boat and waved wildly forward with his outstretched hand.

"To the wreck! To the wreck!" he shouted aloud, above the noise of the breakers. "I see him! I see him!"

And, in truth, Paul turning round towards the hull that still crashed and ground upon the great granite millstones, saw a frantic figure clasping the shattered taffrail with one clenched hand, and waving wildly toward the boats for assistance with the other. The white swirls of fog were growing thinner now, and through the gap they made he could plainly perceive that the figure was beckoning them with a japanned tin despatch-box of the sort in which bankers keep their clients' documents.

"He would go down to fetch them!" Madame Ceriolo cried apologetically from the neighbouring boat. "We were all on deck and might have been saved together, but he would go down to his cabin to fetch them."

Mr. Solomons gazed back at her with contemptuous pity.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE THIEF IS ARRESTED.

THEY were rowing ahead now with all their thews and muscles, and the breakers—those treacherous, terrible, faithless breakers—were carrying them forward with huge lunges towards the broken hull as fast as they could carry them. The great danger lay in the chance of being dashed against the broadside, and crushed to pieces between the waves and the wreck. The one hope of safety lay in being able to bring the boat within leaping distance or rope-catch for the man on the hull without going quite so near as to be actually hurled against her side in the effort.

Lionel Solomons stood on the broken deck, frantic with fear, but still clutching the taffrail. A craven terror had whitened his pasty face to

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deathly whiteness. He clung with one hand to his doubtful support, as the waves washed over and over the shattered hull, and ground its spars to pieces on the stacks of rock behind him. Each moment he disappeared from sight beneath a cataract of spray, then reappeared once more as the wave sank back ineffectual. The whole hull swayed and pounded upon the clattering rocks. But Lionel Solomons still clung on, with the wild tenacious grip of his race, to that last chance of safety. He held the despatch-box as firmly in one hand as he held the taffrail with the other. He was clutching to the last at his life and his money.

Mr. Solomons, who had been the first to see him, was also the one to keep him clearest in view, and he urged the fishermen forward through those boisterous waves with his outstretched forefinger turned ever towards the wretched fugitive.

"My nephew!" he cried out to them. "There he is! That's he! My nephew! My nephew! A hundred pounds apiece to you, men, if you save my nephew!"

Paul could make him out through the mist quite distinctly now, and he half unconsciously observed, even in that moment of peril and intense excitement, that the reason why he had failed to recognise Lionel earlier was because the miserable man had shaved his upper lip, and otherwise superficially disguised his hair and features.

"Yes, it's Leo, it's Leo!" Mr. Solomons cried, convulsively clasping his hands. "He tracked the fellow down and followed him out to sea—at his own peril! Fourteen years! Why, the man ought to be hanged, drawn, and quartered!"

"We'll never make this arrest," the detective murmured, half aside to Paul. "Hold her off there, you fishermen; we shall all be dashed to pieces. We shall drown ourselves if we go near enough to save him."

"Now then, nearer, nearer!" Mr. Solomons cried, mad with suspense and agony, and blue in the face with the horror of the crisis. "Let her go with the wave! Let him jump, let him jump there! Hold her off with your oars, men; don't be afraid! A hundred pounds apiece, I tell you, if you save my nephew!"

As he spoke, the boatmen, taking advantage of the undertow as it rolled off the hull and the reef, put the boat as close in as safety would permit to the riddled broadside, and held up a coil of rope in act to fling it to the terrified fugitive. Lionel still gripped the illuminated despatch-box. "Fling it away, man; fling it away!" the sailor called out, impatiently. "Catch at the rope for dear life as I throw the coil at 'ee!"

Lionel Solomons gazed one instant at the box—the precious box for whose contents he had risked, and was losing, everything. It went against the grain with him, white and palsied coward that he was at that moment,

to relinquish his hold of it even for one passing interval. But life was at stake, dear life itself, to which he clung in his craven dread, even more, if possible, than to his ill-gotten money. Lunging forward as the wave brought the great hull back again nearest to the boat, he flung the case with desperate aim into the stern, where it fell clattering at Mr. Solomons' feet. But the golden opportunity was now past and gone. Before the fishermen could fling the coil, the hull had rocked back again with the advancing wave, and it was only by backing water with all their might on a reflux side-current that the other men could hold off their boat from being hurled, a helpless walnut-shell, against the great retreating broadside. The wreck bore upon the rocks, and Lionel Solomons went with it, now clinging desperately with both hands to that shattered taffrail.

"Try once more," Mr. Solomons shouted, almost beside himself with excitement and anguish, and livid blue from chin to forehead. "A hundred pounds—two hundred pounds each man, if you save him! Leo, Leo, hold on to it still—wait for the next wave! We can come alongside again for you."

The billow rolled back and the hull heeled over, careening in their direction. Once more the boatmen rowed hard against the recoiling undertow. For a moment, with incredible struggles, they held her within distance for throwing the coil.

"Catch it! catch it and jump!" Paul cried at the top of his voice.

Lionel Solomons, coming forward a third time with the careening hull, held out one despairing hand with a wild, clutching motion for the rope they flung him.

At that instant, while they looked for him to catch it and leap, a sudden and terrible change came over the miserable being's distorted features. For the very first time he seemed to focus his sight deliberately on the people in the boat. His gaze fell full on his uncle's face. Their eyes met. Then Lionel's moved hastily to Paul's and the detective's. There was a brief interval of doubt. He seemed to hesitate. Next instant the coil fell, unwinding itself, into the water by his side, not six inches short, and Lionel Solomons' last chance was gone for ever.

Instead of leaning forward and catching it, he had flung up his arms wildly in the air as the coil approached him, and, shrieking out in a voice that could be heard above the crash of the breakers and the grinding jar of the hull upon the rocks, "O, God! my uncle!" had let go his hold altogether upon the unsteady taffrail.

His sin had found him out. He dared not face the man he had so cruelly robbed of a life's savings.

Then, all of a sudden, as they held back the boat with the full force of six stalwart arms, they saw a great billow burst over the whole

wreck tumultuously. As the foam cleared away and the water came pouring in wild cataracts over her side, they looked once more for their man upon the clean-swept deck. But they looked in vain. The taffrail was gone, and the skylights above the cabin.

And Lionel Solomons was no longer visible. The great wave had swept him off, and was tossing and pounding him now upon the jagged peaks of granite.

Mr. Solomons fell back in his place at the stern. His colour was no longer blue, but deadly white, like Lionel's. Some awful revulsion had taken place within him. He bowed down his face between his hands like a broken-hearted man, and rocked himself to and fro above his knees convulsively.

"And I drove him to his death!" he cried, rocking himself still in unspeakable remorse, and horror, and anguish. "I drove him to his death when I meant to save him!"

Seething inwardly in soul, Paul knew the old man had found out everything now. In that last awful moment, when the drowning nephew shrank, at the final gasp, from the uncle he had so cruelly and ungratefully robbed, it came in with a burst upon Mr. Solomons' mind that it was Leo himself who had stolen the securities. It was Leo he had hounded and hunted down in the wreck. It was Leo he had confronted, like an evil conscience, in that last drowing agony. It was Leo for whom he had demanded with threats and curses fourteen years' imprisonment! The horror of it struck Mr. Solomons mute and dazed. He rocked himself up and down in a speechless conflict of emotion. He could neither cry nor groan nor call out now; he could only gaze, blankly and awfully, at the white mist in front of him.

Leo had robbed him—Leo, for whom he had toiled and slaved so long! And he had tracked him down, unconsciously, unwittingly, till he made himself, against his will, Leo's executioner!

"We can do no more good here," the detective murmured in low tones to Paul. "I felt sure it was him, but I didn't like to say so. We may go ashore now. This 'ere arrest ain't going to be effected."

"Row back!" Paul said. "There's nobody else on the wreck. If we row ashore at once we can find out who's saved and how many are missing."

They rowed ashore by the same long detour to avoid the reef, and saw the little cove now looming distinctly through the cold morning mist to the left before them. On the strip of shingle a crowd was drawn up, gathered together in knots around some dark unseen objects. They landed and approached, Mr. Solomons still white and almost rigid in the face, but walking blindly forward, as in a dream, or like some dazed and terrified dumb creature at bay in the market-place. Four or five corpses lay huddled upon the beach;

some others the bystanders were trying rudely to revive, or were carrying between them, like logs, to the shelter of their cottages.

A group of dripping creatures sat apart, wringing their hands, or looking on with the stolid indifference of acute hopelessness. Among them was one in a pilot-coat whom some of the bystanders were regarding with supreme pity.

"Poor thing!" one woman said to Paul as they approached. "She was married a-Saturday—and her husband's missing!"

Paul looked at her with an indefinable sense of profound distaste and loathing. The detective, who followed with the despatch-box still held tight in his hand, cast his eye upon her hard.

"I've got no warrant for arresting *her*," he observed grimly, "but she'd ought to be one of them."

Mr. Solomons sat down upon the beach, quite motionless. He gazed away vaguely in the direction of the wreck. Presently a dark body appeared upon the crest of a long wave to seaward. One of the sailors, plunging boldly through the breakers upon a recoiling wave, with a rope round his waist, struck out with brave arms in the direction of the body. Mr. Solomons watched with strangely passive interest. The sailor made straight for it, and grasped it by the hair—short, curly hair, black and clotted with the waves—and brought it back in tow as his companions pulled him by the rope over the crest of a big breaker. Mr. Solomons sat still and viewed it from afar. The face was battered out of all recognition and covered with blood, but the hands and the dress were beyond mistake. Three or four of the passengers gathered round it with awe-struck glances.

"Hush, hush," they murmured. "Keep it from her for awhile. It's poor Mr. Burton. His uncle's here, they say—on the beach somewhere about. And there's Mrs. Burton, sitting crying by the coastguard on the shingle over yonder."

As the words fell on his ears and crushed the last grain of hope—that fatal alias telling him all the terrible story in full at once—Mr. Solomons rose and staggered blindly forward. Paul held his hand, for he thought he would fall; but Mr. Solomons walked erect and straight, though with reeling footsteps like one crushed and paralyzed. He knelt beside the body, and bent over it tenderly. The tears were in his eyes, but they didn't drop.

"Oh, Leo, my boy!" he cried; "oh, Leo, Leo, Leo! why didn't you ask me for it? Why didn't you ask me? You had but to ask, and you knew it was yours! Oh, Leo, Leo, Leo! why need you do it like this? You've killed yourself, my boy, and you've broken my heart for me!"

At the words, Madame Ceriolo rushed forward with a magnificent burst of theatrical anguish. She flung herself upon the body

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passionately, like a skilled actress that she was, and took the dead hand in hers and kissed it twice over. But Mr. Solomons pushed her aside with unconscious dignity.

"Not now," he said calmly; "not now, if you please. He's mine, not yours. I would never have left him. I will care for him still. Go back to your seat, woman!"

And he bent once more, heart-broken, over the prostrate body.

Madame Ceriolo slunk back aghast, into the circle of spectators. She buried her face in her hands, and cried aloud in her misery.

But the old man knelt there, long and motionless, just gazing blankly at that battered corpse, and murmuring to himself in half-inarticulate tones:

"Leo, Leo, Leo! To think I should have killed you! You had but to ask, and you knew it was yours, my boy. Why didn't you ask? Oh, why didn't you ask me?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

RELICT OF THE LATE LIONEL SOLOMONS.

THEY waited on at Lizard Town till after the funeral. Mr. Solomons, in a certain dazed and dogged fashion, went through with it all, making his arrangements for a costly Cornish serpentine monument with a short inscription in memory of Leo, to the outward eye almost as if nothing very much out of the way had happened. But Paul, looking below the surface, could easily see that in his heart of hearts the poor broken old money-lender was utterly crushed and shattered by this terrible disillusionment. It wasn't merely the loss of his nephew that weighed down his grey hairs—though that in itself would have gone far to break him—it was the shame and disgrace of his crime and his ingratitude, the awful awakening that overtook him so suddenly in the boat that morning. He could hardly even wish his nephew alive again, knowing him now exactly for what he was; yet the way he leant over the coffin where that bruised and battered face lay white and still in its still white graveclothes, muttering, "Leo, Leo," to himself as he gazed on it, was painfully pathetic for anyone to look upon. Paul knew that the old man's life was clean cut away from under him. The end for which he had laboured so hard and so sternly for so many years was removed at one swoop from his path in life; and the very remembrance of it now was a pang and a humiliation to him.

Paul observed, however, that in the midst of this unspeakable domestic tragedy, Mr. Solomons seemed to recline upon his shoulder for aid, and to trust and confide in him with singular unreserve, even more fully than heretofore. On the very evening of Leo's funeral, indeed, as he sat alone in his own room at the Lizard Hotel, Mr. Solomons came to him with that white and impassive face he had pre-

served ever since the morning of the wreck, and, beckoning to him with his hand, said, in an ominous tone of too collected calmness:

"Come into my room, Sir Paul; that woman is coming to speak with me to-night, and I want you to be by to hear whatever she may have to tell me."

Paul rose in silence, much exercised in soul. He had fears of his own as to how Madame Ceriolo's story might further lacerate the poor old man's torn heart; but he went reluctantly. Madame Ceriolo had stopped on at the Lizard, meanwhile, partly because she felt herself compelled in common decency to wait where she was till Leo was buried, but partly also because she wanted to know how much, if anything, Leo's widow might still hope to extract out of old Cento-Cento's well-filled pockets. She had stood ostentatiously that day beside Lionel Solomons' open grave with much display of that kind of grief betokened by copious use of a neat cambric pocket-handkerchief with a coronet in the corner; and she was very well satisfied when, in the evening, Mr. Solomons sent a curiously-worded card to her in her own room:

"If you will step into my parlour for half an hour's talk, about eight o'clock, I wish to speak with you."

The little adventuress came in to the minute, with very red eyes, and with such an attempt at impromptu mourning as her hasty researches among the Helston shops had already allowed her to improvise for the occasion. Her get up, under the circumstances, was strictly irreproachable. She looked the very picture of inconsolable grief, not wholly unmixed with a sad state of pecuniary destitution. It disconcerted her a little when she saw Paul, too, was to be included in the family party—he knew too much to be quite agreeable to her—but she quickly recovered her equanimity on that score, and appealed to "Sir Paul" with simple womanly eloquence as an old Mentone friend, the very person who had been the means of first introducing her to her own dear Lionel. Mr. Solomons listened with grimly imperious face.

"What I want to hear," he said at last, fairly confronting the little woman with his sternly critical eye, "is, What do you know about this dreadful business?"

"What business?" Madame Ceriolo asked, with a little tearful astonishment.

Mr. Solomons eyed her again even more sternly than before.

"You know very well what business," he retorted with some scorn. "Don't make an old man go over his shame again, woman. By this time all Cornwall has heard it from the detective, no doubt. If you pretend not to know you'll only exasperate me. Let's be plain with one another. Your best chance in this matter is to be perfectly straightforward."

His tone took Madame Ceriolo completely by surprise. She had never before in her life

been placed in a position where her little feminine wiles and pretences proved utterly useless. She gasped for breath for a second, and stared blankly at the stern old man, out of whom this terrible episode seemed to have driven for ever all the genuine kernel of geniality and kindness. Paul was truly sorry for her mute embarrassment.

"I—I—don't know what you mean," she answered at last, leaning back in her chair and bursting into real, irrepressible womanly tears. "I thought you wanted to speak to me as Lionel's widow."

Mr. Solomons let her lean back and cry till she was tired. Meanwhile he stood and eyed her with undisguised grimness.

"As soon as you're capable of reasonable talk," he said at last, in a cold, clear tone, "I have some questions to ask you. Answer them plainly if you want attention."

Madame Ceriolo stifled her sobs with an effort, and dried her eyes. She was really and truly frightened now. She saw she had made a false step—perhaps an irretrievable one—or, rather, she saw that the wreck and discovery and Lionel's death had so completely upset all her well-laid plans for her future in life that retreat in any direction was well-nigh impossible. She was the victim of contingencies, sacrificed by fate on the altar of the unforeseen. She composed herself, however, with what grace she could, and answered bravely, through the ghost of a sob, but in a creditable firm voice, that she was quite prepared now to consider any questions Mr. Solomons might put to her.

Mr. Solomons, sitting there, wrecked and unmanned himself, began once more in a mood of hollow calmness:

"You say you come as Lionel's widow. Is that true, in the first place? Were you ever married to him? If so, when, where, and what evidence have you?"

With the conscious pride of the virtuous British matron at last achieved, Madame Ceriolo drew from her pocket an official-looking paper, which she handed across at once for Mr. Solomons' inspection.

"There's my marriage-certificate," she said simply, "saved from the wreck."

He felt she was scoring. The old man had miscalculated and misunderstood her character.

Mr. Solomons scanned it close and hard.

"This seems perfectly correct," he said at last, in his cold, stern tone. "I can find no mistake in it. My poor boy's signature, firm and clear as ever. And on Saturday last, too! Oh, God! the shame of it!"

Madame Ceriolo bowed and answered nothing.

Mr. Solomons gazed at it and sighed three times. Then he looked up once more with a fiercely scrutinizing look at the strange woman.

"Lionel Solomons," he murmured half to

himself, perusing the marriage-lines through his slowly-rolling tears—"Lionel Solomons. My poor boy's own signature—Lionel Solomons. No deception there. All plain and aboveboard."

Then he raised his face, and met Madame Ceriolo's eyes with sudden vehement inquiry.

"But you called yourselves Burton on board," he continued fiercely. "You were Mrs. Burton, you know, to your fellow passengers. Why did you do that, if you were all so innocent?"

The unexpectedness of the question took Madame's breath away once more. A second time she broke down and began to cry. Paul looked across at her with genuine sympathy. No young man, at least, can bear to see tears in a pretty woman's eyes, rightly or wrongfully. But Mr. Solomons felt no such human weakness. He paused as before, rhadamantines in his severity, and awaited her restoration to a rational and collected frame of mind for undergoing further cross-examination. Madame cried on silently for a moment or so, and then dried her tears.

"You're very cruel," she murmured, sobbing, "so soon after poor dear Lionel's death, too! You're very, very cruel!"

Mr. Solomons waved his hand impatiently on one side.

"You lured him to his death," he answered with grim, retributive sternness. "No talk like that, if you please. It only aggravates me. I mean to do what I think is just, if you'll answer my questions truly and simply. I ask you again: Why, if you please, did you call yourself Burton?"

"Poor Leo told me to," Madame sobbed, quite nonplussed.

"Did he explain his reasons?" Mr. Solomons persisted.

"N—not exactly. . . . He said he must go *incognito* to South America. . . . I thought he might have business reasons of his own. . . . I come of a noble Tyrolese family myself. I don't understand business."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Solomons answered with crushing promptitude. "Don't talk like that. Sherrard, my detective, has got up the case against you. Here are his telegrams from town, and, if I chose, I could prosecute; but for Leo's sake—for Leo's memory's sake—I prefer to leave it." He faltered for a moment. "I couldn't have Leo's name dragged through the mud in the Courts," he went on, with a melting inflection in his stern voice; "and for his sake—for Leo's sake—I've induced Sherrard and the Scotland Yard people not to proceed for the present against you. But that's all lies. You know it's lies. You're the daughter of an Italian organ-grinder, born in a court off Saffron Lane, and your mother was a ballet-girl at Drury Lane Theatre."

Madame bowed her head and wept silently once more.

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"You—you're a cruel, hard man," she murmured half inaudibly.

But Mr. Solomons had screwed his righteous indignation up to sticking-point now, and was not to be put down by such feminine blandishments.

"You're a grown woman, too," he went on, staring hard in her face and flinging out his words at her with angry precision. "You're a woman of the world, and you're forty, if you're a day—though you've falsely put yourself down in the marriage-lines as twenty-eight—and you know as well as I do that you're not so innocent and trustful and confiding as all that comes to; you perfectly well understood why . . . my poor boy wanted to give a false name on board the *Dom Pedro*. You perfectly well understood why he wanted to rob me; and you egged him on, you egged him on to it. If you hadn't egged him on he'd never have done it. My poor Leo was far too clever a lad to do such a foolish thing as that—except with a woman driving him. There's nothing on earth a man won't do when a woman like you once fairly gets hold of him. It's *you* that have done it all; it's you that are guiltiest; it's you that have robbed me of my money—and of Leo."

Madame Ceriolo covered with her face in her hands, but answered nothing. Clever woman as she was, and swift to do evil, she was still no match for an old man's fiery indignation.

"But you did worse than that," Mr. Solomons went on, after a brief pause, like an accusing angel—"you did worse than that. For all that, I might, perhaps, in the end forgive you. But what else you did I can never forgive. In the last hour of all you basely deserted him!"

Madame Ceriolo raised her head and stared him wildly back.

"No, I didn't," she cried, in anger. "I didn't, I didn't!"

Mr. Solomons rose and looked down upon her with scorn.

"More lies," he answered, contemptuously. "More lies still, woman. Those who were with you on the steamer that night have told me all. Don't try to deceive me. When you saw all hope was gone, you left him to his fate, and thought only of saving your own wretched life—you miserable creature! You left him to drown. You know you left him."

"He *would* go back to his cabin to fetch his valuables!" Madame Ceriolo moaned. "It wasn't my fault. I tried to dissuade him."

"Lies!" Mr. Solomons answered once more with astonishing vehemence. "You let him go willingly. You abetted him in his errand. You wanted to be rid of him. And as soon as he was gone, you tried to save yourself by jumping into a boat. I have found out everything. You missed your jump, and were carried off by the wave. But you never waited or cared to know what had become of

Leo. Your one thought was for your own miserable neck, you Delliiah!"

Madame Ceriolo plunged her face in her hands afresh, and still answered nothing. She must hold her tongue for prudence sake, lest speech should undo her. The old man had spoken of doing what was just. There were still hopes he might relent to some practical purpose. It was best not to reply and needlessly irritate him. So she sobbed mutely on, and waited for a turn in the tide of his emotions.

For many minutes Mr. Solomons went on talking, explaining, partly to her and partly to Paul, who looked on somewhat horrified, the nature of the whole conspiracy, as he understood it, and Madame still cowered and shook with sobbing.

At last Mr. Solomons paused, and allowed her to recover her equanimity a little. Then he began once more, eyeing her sternly as ever.

"And now, woman," he said, "if I'd only wanted to tell you all this I wouldn't have sent for you at all this evening. But I wished also to give you a chance of explaining, if explanation were possible, before I decided. You take refuge in lies, and will explain nothing. So I know the worst I believe is true. You concocted this plan, and when you found it was failing, you basely tried to desert my poor Lionel. . . . Very well; on that score I owe you nothing but fourteen years' imprisonment with hard labour. Still, I loved Lionel; and I can never forget that you are Lionel's widow. This paper you give me shows me you were his wife—a pitiful wife for such a man as my Lionel. But he made you his wife, and I respect his decision. As long as you live I shall pay you an allowance of two hundred a year. I will give a lump sum that will bring in that much to the Jewish Board of Guardians of London; they shall hold it in trust for you during your life, and on your death it will revert to the poor of my own people. . . . If ever you'd told me you'd wanted to marry Leo you'd have been richer far—a great deal richer than even Leo suspected—for I've done well for myself in life: for Leo—for Leo. But you chose to go to work the underhand way, and that shall be your penalty. You may know what you've lost. Never come near my sight again. Never write to me or communicate with me in any way hereafter. Never dare to obtrude yourself on my eyes for a moment. But take your two hundred. . . . Take them and go away. . . . Do you accept my condition?"

Madame felt there was no use in further pretences now. "I do," she answered, calmly, drying her reddened eyes with surprising ease. "Two hundred a year for life, payable quarterly?"

Mr. Solomons nodded. "Just so," he said. "Now go, woman."

Madame Ceriolo hesitated. "This has been a curious interview," she said, staring round and minding a little, "and Sir Paul Gascoyne and you will go away, perhaps, and take advantage of my silence to say to other people—"

Mr. Solomons cut her short with a terrible look. "I would never soil my lips with mentioning your name again," he cried out, angrily. "You are dead to me for ever. I've done with you now. And as for Sir Paul Gascoyne—why, miserable creature that you are—don't you even know when you have a gentleman to deal with?"

Madame Ceriolo bowed, and retreated hastily. It was an awkward interview, to be sure; but, after all, two hundred a year for life is always something. And she thought that she could really and truly trust to the scallywag's innocence: he was one of those simple-minded, foolish young men, don't you know, who have queer ideas of their own about the sacredness of honour!

CHAPTER XLIV.

"A MODERN MIRACLE."

ONE other curious thing happened before they left Cornwall. At breakfast next morning, as they sat moody and taciturn—for Mr. Solomons didn't greatly care to talk, nor Paul to break in upon his companion's blank misery—the elder man suddenly interrupted the even flow of their silence by saying with a burst, "I think Miss Blair lives in Cornwall."

"She does," Paul answered, starting, and completely taken aback, for he had no idea Mr. Solomons even knew of his Nea's existence. Then, after a slight pause, he added, shyly, "She lives near Fowey."

"We passed the junction station on our way down, I noticed," Mr. Solomons went on in a measured voice.

"Yes," Paul replied, surprised once more that the old man had observed it. Young people always imagine their little love-affairs entirely escape the eyes of their elders. Which is absurd. As a matter of fact, everybody discovers them.

"We shall pass it again on our way back," Mr. Solomons went on, in that weary, dreary, dead-alive tone in which he had said everything since Lionel's death and his terrible awakening.

"Naturally," Paul answered, looking up in amaze, and much wondering whither this enigmatic conversation tended.

Mr. Solomons paused, and looked over towards him kindly. "Paul, my boy," he said, with a little tremor in his throat—"you'll excuse my calling you Paul now, as I used to do in the old days, you know—Paul, my boy, it seems a pity, now you're so near,

you shouldn't drop in as you pass and see her."

Paul let his fork drop in blank astonishment. To be sure, he had thought as much a dozen times himself, but he had never dared to envisage it as practically possible.

"How good of you to think of it—and now especially!" he exclaimed, with genuine gratitude.

Mr. Solomons drew himself up stiffly, and froze at once. "I was thinking," he said, "that, as a matter of business, it might be well if you got that question about marrying settled some day, one way or the other. I regarded it only in the light of my own interests—the interests of the Jewish widows and orphans. They're all I have left to work for now; but you don't get rid of the habits of a lifetime in a day; and I shall look after their money as I looked after—Lionel's. It's become an instinct with me. Now, you see, Sir Paul, I've got a vested interest, so to speak, in your future—it's mortgaged to me, in fact, as you know; and I must do my best by it. If you won't marry the sort of lady I expected you to marry, and had a claim to believe you'd try to marry, in my interest—at least don't let me be a loser by your remaining single. I've always considered that being in love's a very bad thing indeed for a man's business prospects. It upsets his mind, and prevents him from concentrating himself body and soul on the work he has in hand. A man who has to make his own way in the world, therefore, ought to do one of two things. Either he should avoid falling in love at all, which is much the safest plan—I followed it myself—or else, if he can't do that, he should marry out of hand, and be able to devote himself thenceforward unreservedly to business."

Paul could hardly help smiling at his intensely practical view of the situation, in spite of the cold air of utter despondency with which Mr. Solomons delivered it; but he answered with as grave a face as he could, "I think myself it may set the other way—as a spur and incentive to further action."

"No," Mr. Solomons retorted firmly. "In your case, no. If you waited to marry till you'd cleared off the debt, you'd lose heart at once. As a security for myself, I advise you to marry as soon as ever the lady'll take you."

"And yet," Paul answered, "it was consideration for your claims that made us both feel that it was utterly hopeless."

"Exactly so," Mr. Solomons replied in the same cold, hard voice. "That's just where it is. What chance have I got of ever seeing my money back again—my hard-saved money, that I advanced for your education and to make a gentleman of you—if you begin by falling in love with a penniless girl, and feeling, both of you, that it's utterly hopeless? Is that the kind of mood that makes a man

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fit for earning and saving money, I ask you?"

"I'm afraid not," Paul answered penitently.

"And I'm afraid not, either," Mr. Solomons went on, with icy sternness. "You've paid up regularly so far—that I admit in justice; and, mind, I shall expect you to pay up just as regularly in future. Don't suppose for a moment I won't look after the Jewish widows' and orphan's interests as carefully as ever I looked after poor Leo's. You've got into debt with your eyes open, and you've got to get out of it now as best you can." (Paul, listening aghast, felt that his disillusionment had hardened Mr. Solomons terribly.) "And the only thing I can see for you to do is to put the boldest face upon it at once, and marry this young lady."

"You think so?" Paul answered timidly, half wishing he could see things in the same light.

"Yes, I do," Mr. Solomons replied, with snappish promptitude. "I look at it this way: You can keep your wife for very little more than it costs you to keep yourself; and your talents will be set free for your work alone. You could teach her to help you copy your manuscripts or work a typewriter. I believe you'd earn twice as much in the end if you married her for a typewriter, and you'd pay me off a great deal faster."

"Well, I'll think about it," Paul answered.

"Don't think about it," Mr. Solomons replied with curt incisiveness. "In business, thinking's the thief of opportunity. It's prompt decision that wins the prize. Stop at Fowey this very afternoon and talk it over off-hand with the lady and her father."

And so, to his own immense surprise, almost before he had time to realize the situation, Paul found himself, by three o'clock that day, knocking at the door of Mr. Blair's rectory.

He knocked with a good deal of timorous hesitation; for though, to be sure, he had sent on a telegram to announce his coming to Nea, he was naturally so modest and diffident a young man that he greatly feared his reception by Nea's father. Fathers are always such hard nuts to tackle. Indeed, to say the truth, Paul was even now, in spite of experience, slow to perceive the difference in his position made by his accession to the dignity of a baronetcy. No doubt, every day would serve to open his eyes more to the real state of the case in this important particular; but each such discovery stood alone, as it were, on its own ground, and left him almost as nervous as ever before each new situation, and almost as much surprised when that social "Open sesame!" once more succeeded in working its familiar wonders.

Any doubt he might have felt, however, disappeared almost at once when Nea in person, more visibly agitated than he had ever yet beheld her, opened the door for him, and when her father, with profuse hospitality, instead of

regarding him as a dangerous intruder, expressed with much warmth his profound regret that Sir Paul couldn't stop the night at the rectory. Nay, more, that prudent father took special care they should all go out into the garden for the brief interview, and that he himself should keep at a safe distance with a convenient sister-in-law, pacing the lawn while Paul and Nea walked on in front and discoursed—presumably about the flowers in the border.

Thus brought face to face with the future, Paul briefly explained to Nea Mr. Solomons' new point of view, and the question which it left open so clearly before them.

Now, Nea was young, but Nea was a rock of practical common-sense, as your good and impulsive West Country girl is often apt to be. Instead of jumping foolishly at Mr. Solomons' proposal because it offered a loophole for immediate marriage, as you or I would have done, she answered at once, with judicious wisdom, that, much as she loved Paul, and much as she longed for that impossible day to arrive when they two might be one, she couldn't bear, even with Mr. Solomons' consent, so far to burden Paul's already too heavily mortgaged future.

"Paul," she said, trembling, for it was a hard wrench, "if I loved you less, I might perhaps say yes; but I love you so much that I must still say no to you. Perhaps some day you may make a great hit, and then you could wipe off all your burdens at once—and then, dear, we two could be happy together. But, till then, I love you too well to add to your anxieties. I know there's some truth in what Mr. Solomons says; but it's only half a truth if you examine it closely. When I look forward and think of the long struggle it would bring you, and the weary days of working at your desk, and the fears and anxieties, I can't bear to face it. We must wait and hope still, Paul: after all, it looks a little nearer now than when you said good-bye to me that day at Oxford."

Paul looked down at the gravel-path with a certain shock of momentary disappointment. He had expected all this; indeed, if Nea hadn't said it, he would have thought the less of her; and yet, for all that, he was disappointed.

"It seems such an interminable time to wait," he said, with a rising lump in his throat. "I know you're right—I felt sure you'd say so—but, still, it's hard to put it off again, Nea. When Mr. Solomons spoke to me I half felt it was best to do as he said. But now you've put it as you put it just now, I feel I've no right to impose the strain upon you, dear."

"Some day something will turn up," Nea answered hopefully—for Paul's sake—lest she should wholly crush him. "I can wait for you for ever, Paul. If you love me, that's enough. And it's a great thing that I can write to you, and that my letters cheer you."

Nevertheless, it was with a somewhat heavy

heart that Paul rejoined Mr. Solomons at Par Junction that evening, feeling that he must still wait, as before, for some indefinite future.

"Well, what have you arranged?" Mr. Solomons asked, with a certain shadow of interest rare with him these last days, as he advanced to greet him.

"Oh, nothing!" Paul answered blankly. "Miss Blair says we oughtn't to get married while I'm so much burdened; and I didn't think it would be right on her account to urge her to share my burdens under such peculiar circumstances. You see, I've her interests as well as yours to think about."

Mr. Solomons glanced hard at him with a suspicious look. For a second his lips parted, irresolute, as if he half intended to say something important. Then they shut again close, like an iron trap, with that cold, hard look now fixed sternly upon them.

"I shall lose my money," he said curtly. "I shall never be paid as long as I live. You'll do no proper work with that girl on your brain. But no matter—no matter. The Jewish widows and orphans won't lose in the end. I can trust you to work your fingers to the bone rather than leave a penny unpaid, however long it may take you. And mark you, Sir Paul, as you and the young lady won't follow my advice, I expect you to do it, too—I expect you to do it."

Paul bowed his head to his taskmaster.

"I will pay you every penny, Mr. Solomons," he said, "if I work myself to death with it."

The old man's face grew harder and colder still.

"Well, mind you do it quick," he said testily. "I haven't got long left to live now, and I don't want to be kept out of my money for ever."

But at the rectory near Fowey, if Paul could only have seen the profoundly affectionate air with which, the moment his back was turned, Mr. Blair threw his arm round his daughter's neck, and inquired eagerly, "Well, what did Sir Paul say to you, Nea?"—even he would have laughed at his own timid fears *enent* the bearding of that alarming animal, the British father, in his own rectorial lair in Cornwall. And had he further observed the dejected surprise with which Mr. Blair received Nea's guarded report of their brief interview, he would have wondered to himself how he could ever have overlooked the mollifying influence on the paternal heart of that magical sound, "Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet."

For Mr. Blair heaved a deep sigh as he heard it, and murmured softly to himself:

"He seems a most worthy, high-minded, well-principled young man. I wish we could help him out of his difficulties, anyhow."

CHAPTER XLV.

PRESSURE AND TENSION.

A YEAR passed away—a long, long year of twelve whole weary months—during which many small but important incidents happened to Paul and to Nea also.

For one thing, a few days after Paul's return to town, Mr. Solomons dropped in one afternoon at the young man's chambers in the little lane off Gower Street. The week had aged him much. A settled gloom brooded over his face, and that stern look about the corners of his mouth seemed more deeply ingrained in its very lines than ever. His hair was grayer and his eyes less keen. But, strange to say, the blue tint had faded wholly from his lips, and his cheeks bore less markedly the signs of that wear of the heart which some short time before had been so painfully apparent. He sat moodily in Paul's easy chair, and drew forth a folded sheet of official-looking paper from his inner breast-pocket.

"Sir Paul," he said, bending forward, with less of familiarity and more coldness than usual, "I've brought up this paper here for you to take care of. I've brought it to you rather than to anybody else because I believe I can really trust you. After the blow I've received—and how terrible a blow it was no man living will ever know, for I'm of the sort that these things affect internally—after the blow I've received, perhaps I'm a fool to trust any man. But I think not. I think I know you. As I said to that miserable woman the other evening, one ought at least to know when one has a gentleman to deal with."

Paul bowed his head with a faint blush of modesty at so much commendation from Mr. Solomons.

"It's very good of you," he said, "to think so well of me. I hope, Mr. Solomons, I shall always be able to deserve your confidence."

Mr. Solomons glanced up suspiciously once more.

"I hope so," he said, in a very dry voice. "I hope you won't forget that a debt's a debt, whether it's owed to poor Leo and me or to the Metropolitan Jewish Widows and Orphans. Well, that's neither here nor there. What I want you to do to-day is to look at this will—circumstances have compelled me to make a new one—and to see whether it meets with your approbation."

Paul took the paper, with a faint smile, and read it carefully through. It resembled the former one in most particulars, except, of course, for the entire omission of Lionel's name in the list of bequests; but it differed in two or three minor points. The bulk of Mr. Solomons' fortune was now left, in trust, to the Jewish Board of Guardians; and the notes and acceptances of Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, were specially mentioned by name among the effects bequeathed to those worthy

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gentlemen, to be employed for the good of the Metropolitan Hebrew community. Mention was also made of a certain sum already paid over in trust to the Board for the benefit of Maria Agnese Solomons, widow of Lionel Solomons, deceased, which was to revert on the death of the said Maria Agnese to the General Trust, and be employed by the Guardians for the same purpose. There was a special bequest of ten pounds to Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, for a mourning ring; and a similar bequest to Faith, wife of Charles Thistleton, Esquire, and one of the testator's most esteemed friends. But beyond that small testimony of regard there was little to interest Paul in the document. He handed it back with a smile to Mr. Solomons, and said shortly:

"I think there's nothing to object to in any part of it. It was kind of you to remember myself and my sister."

Mr. Solomons' eyes looked him through and through.

"I want you to take care of it," he said abruptly.

"I will," Paul answered. "But I would like first to ask you just one favour."

"What's that?" Mr. Solomons asked sharply.

"If I can succeed in paying you off during—well, during your own lifetime, will you kindly remove the mention of my notes and acceptances? I wouldn't like them to be noticed in the papers, if possible."

"I will," Mr. Solomons answered, looking at him harder than ever. "Sir Paul, you're a very honourable young man."

"Thank you," Paul replied. "You are always very good to me."

"They don't all talk like that!" Mr. Solomons retorted, with temper. "They mostly call me a 'damned old Jew.' That's generally all the praise a man gets for helping people out of their worst difficulties."

And he left the will with Paul, with many strict injunctions to keep it safe, and to take care nobody ever had a chance of meddling with it.

In the course of the year, too, Paul was very successful in his literary ventures. Work flowed in faster than he could possibly do it. That's the luck of the trade: sometimes the deserving man plods on unrecognized till he's nearly fifty before anybody hears of him; sometimes editors seem to hunt out with a rush the merest beginner who shows promise or performance. It's all a lottery, and Paul happened to be one of the lucky few who draw winning numbers. Perhaps that magical suffix of "Bart." stood here, too, in good stead; perhaps his own merits secured him custom; but, at any rate, he wrote hopefully to Nea, if health and strength kept up, he could get as many engagements now as ever he wanted.

Health and strength, however, were severely

tried in the effort to fulfil Mr. Solomons' exacting requirements. Paul worked early and late, at the hardest of all trades (for if you think literature is mere play, dear sir or madam, you're profoundly mistaken); and he saved too much out of food and lodging in order to meet as many as possible of those hateful notes from quarter to quarter. Mr. Solomons himself remonstrated at times; he complained that Paul, by starving himself and working too hard, was running the risk in the long run of defrauding his creditor.

"For all that, you know," he said demonstratively, "your health and strength's my only security. Of course there's the insurance; that's all right if you die outright; but literary men who break down don't generally die; they linger on for ever, a burden to their friends or the parish, with nervous diseases. As a duty to me, Sir Paul, and to the Metropolitan Widows and Orphans, you ought to feed yourself better and take more rest. I don't mean to say I don't like to see a young man working hard and paying up regular; that's only honest; but what I say is this: there's moderation in all things. It isn't fair to me, you see, to run the risk of laying yourself up before you've paid it all off to the last farthing."

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Mr. Solomons received Paul's hard-earned money with a certain close-fisted joy which sometimes shocked, and even surprised, his simple-hearted young debtor. To say the truth, the miserly instinct in Mr. Solomons, kept somewhat in check by many better feelings during Mr. Lionel's lifetime, seemed now completely to have gained the upper hand in his cramped and narrowed later nature. They say the ruling passions grow fiercer in old age; doubtless they are wrong; but in Mr. Solomons' case the proverbial paradox had at least a certain external semblance of justification. Quarter after quarter, as Paul paid in his instalments of principal and interest, the old man grumbled over and over again at the insufficiency of the amount and the slowness of the repayment. Yet what seemed to Paul strangest of all was the apparent contradiction that while Mr. Solomons thus perpetually urged him by implication to work harder and harder, he was at the same time for ever urging him in so many words to take more holiday and spend more money and time on food and pleasure. Not that Mr. Solomons ever put these requests upon sympathetic grounds; he always based them solely and wholly on considerations of his own interest.

"If you don't take more care of yourself," he would often say, with that cold, stern face unchanged for one moment, "you'll make yourself ill, and go off into a nervous wreck, and come upon the parish—and then what'll become of all the money I've advanced you?"

"I can't help it," Paul would answer. "I feel I must, somehow; I can never rest till

I've cleared it all off, and am my own master."

"I know what that means," Mr. Solomons said once, near the end of the year, when autumn was coming round again. "You're in a hurry to marry this young lady down in Cornwall. Ah, that's just the way of all you borrowing people. You enter into contracts with one man first, for money down, his own hard-saved money, that he's made and hoarded; and then, when you've eaten and drunk it all up, you go and fall in love with some girl you've never seen in your lives before, and for her sake, a stranger's sake, you forget all about your vested obligations. I wish you'd take my advice and marry the young woman out of hand. I'd be all the safer in the end to get my money."

Paul shook his head.

"I can't bear to," he said, "and even if I would, Miss Blair wouldn't. She said herself she'd never burden my life any further. I must work on now to the bitter end, and in the course of years, perhaps, I may be able to marry her."

"In the course of years!" Mr. Solomons echoed, fretfully. "In the course of years indeed! And do you think, then, I'm going to live on for ever? No, no; I want to see some pleasure and satisfaction out of my money in my own lifetime. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing much longer. You ought to marry her, and settle down in life to do better work. If you'd get a house of your own now, with Lady Gascoyne at the head of your table, and could give dinners, and invite the world, and take your proper part in London Society, you'd soon be coining money—a man of your brains, with no home to entertain in! You're keeping me out of my own—that's just what I call it."

"I'm sorry I disappoint you, Mr. Solomons," Paul answered, sadly; "but I'm afraid I can't help it. I can never marry till I'm independent."

Mr. Solomons rose and moved to the door.

"I must put a stop to this nonsense," he murmured, resolutely. "I can't let this sort of thing go on much longer. If I have to put the Courts in action to get what I want, I must put a stop before another week to this confounded nonsense."

"Put the Courts in action!" Paul cried, aghast at the ugly phrase. "Oh, no, Mr. Solomons, you can never mean that! You won't expose an old friend, who has always tried his best to repay you for all your kindness, to so much unpleasantness. I'll do anything—in reason—to prevent such a contingency."

But Mr. Solomons only gazed back at him with that inquiring glance. Then he drew himself up and said with a stony face:

"Sir Paul Gascoyne, I've always said you were a gentleman. I hope you won't compel me to be too hard upon you. I hope you'll

think it over, and see your way to marry the lady."

Paul lunged himself back in his easy-chair as Mr. Solomons closed the door behind him, and felt for once in his life very bitterly against his old benefactor, as he had always considered him. He was half-inclined, in that moment of pique, to take him at his word, and to beg and implore Nea to marry him immediately.

As for Mr. Solomons, in his lonely room at Hillborough that night, he sat down by himself, with a resolute air, to write two letters which he hoped might influence his recalcitrant debtor. He wrote them in a firm, clear hand, little shaky with age, and read them over more than once to himself, admiring his own persuasive eloquence. Then he put them into two envelopes, and duly directed them. The superscription of one was to the Rev. Walter Blair, The Rectory, Lanhydrock, near Fowey, Cornwall. That of the other was to Mrs. Charles Thistleton, Wardlaw House, The Parks, Sheffield. And what specially impelled him to write this last was the fact that Miss Nea Blair was at that moment in the North, on a long-promised visit to Sir Paul's sister.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A TRANSACTION IN DIAMONDS.

THREE days later Mr. Solomons happened to have business in town which took him up into Cheapside on a very unwonted shopping expedition. Mr. Solomons, in fact, was bent on the purchase of jewellery.

He had been more particularly driven to this novel pursuit by the simultaneous receipt of two letters from two opposite ends of England on that self-same morning. One of them bore the Fowey postmark; the other, addressed in a feminine hand, was dated "Sheffield." Mr. Solomons smiled somewhat grimly to himself as he read this last. "Eighteen months of wealth and prosperity have strangely developed our old friend Faith," he thought in his own soul. "How glibly she talks about money now, as if it was water! She doesn't seem to think much about Sir Paul's difficulties. They vanish far more easily in her mind to-day than in the hard old days down at Plowden's Court in Hillborough."

But Mr. Solomons was too much of a philosopher in his way to let this natural evolution of the female mind disturb for a moment his sombre equanimity. Men, he knew, rise sometimes to the occasion; women, always. So he went on his way to London with that settled solid calm of a life that has now no hope left in it, and that goes on its dull routine by pure mechanical habit.

Nevertheless, that habit was the habit of a lifetime devoted to making and saving money. In dealing with a debtor and in haggling with

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a seller, Mr. Solomons' soul was still as keen as ever. He watched over the interests of the Jewish Widows and Orphans as closely as ever in happier times he had watched over his own and Leo's. A gain or loss of sixpence still seemed to him a matter well worth struggling over; a rise or fall of one-eighth per cent. on the market-price of Portuguese Threes still put his overworked heart into a flutter of excitement. It was with judicious care, therefore, that he selected for his patronage the shop of a fellow-tribesman in a street off Cheapside, and proceeded to effect a suitable bargain in jewellery.

The utter downfall of a life's dream would have made most men wholly careless as to money matters. It had only made Mr. Solomons closer-fisted than ever.

"I should like," Mr. Solomons said, as he entered the shop, and addressed himself with severity to the smug-faced and black-whiskered young man at the counter—"I should like to see a diamond necklet."

"Yes, sir. About what price, sir?" the smug-faced young man replied briskly.

Mr. Solomons looked him through and through with a contemptuous air.

"The price," he answered sententially, "depends as a rule to some extent upon the quality."

"Merely as a guide to the class of goods I should first submit to you," the smug-faced young man went on, still more briskly than before. "Our immense stock! The variety of our patterns! The difficulty of a selection!"

"Do you take me for a fool, young man?" Mr. Solomons retorted severely, looking him askance. "Nobody has an immense stock of diamond necklets, ready-made. Show me your goods first, and I'll make my choice. After that, we'll arrive at an arrangement as to value."

"I think, Mr. Nathan," the proprietor observed to the smug-faced young man, who fell back crestfallen, "I'd better attend to this gentleman myself." For he plainly foresaw hard bargaining. "I've met you before, sir, I believe," he went on. "Mr. Solomons of Hillborough."

Mr. Solomons nodded,

"My name, sir," he answered. "I was recommended here by our mutual friend, Mocatta. And I want to see some diamond necklets."

The proprietor did not fall into the smug-faced young man's juvenile error. He knew his trade too well. The two fellow-tribesmen had measured one another at a glance. He brought down a couple of cases and opened them temptingly before Mr. Solomons' face. Mr. Solomons turned them over with a critical hand and eye.

"Not good enough," he said laconically, and the proprietor nodded.

"How are these?" the jeweller asked;

striking a higher note, three octaves up on the gamut of price.

Mr. Solomons regarded them with a shadow on his face. He knew exactly how much he meant to give (which was just why he refrained from mentioning a figure), and he thought these were probably far above his intention. In fact, in order to clarify his conceptions and bring his rusty knowledge well up to date, he had already priced several small lots of gems that very morning at several Christian jewellers.

"How much?" he asked, suspiciously. For he had come to a shop of his own race for the express reason that here only could he indulge in the luxury of bargaining.

"Four hundred pounds," the proprietor said, looking hard at him without moving a muscle.

Mr. Solomons shook his head resolutely.

"More than I want to give," he replied, in that tone of conviction which precludes debate. "It won't do. Show me another."

The proprietor gauged the just mean at once.

"Try these, then," he said, persuasively.

Mr. Solomons' eye picked out its choice at a glance.

"That'll do," he answered, selecting one that precisely suited as to quality. "Lowest figure for this?"

The proprietor glanced at him with inquiring eyes.

"What do you want it for?" he asked.

"It's for a lady of title," Mr. Solomons answered, swelling with just pride. "What'll you take for it?"

The proprietor put his head on one side, reflectively.

"We have a fixed price, of course," he said.

"Of—course," Mr. Solomons echoed, slowly.

"But to you, Mr. Solomons, as a friend of our friend Mocatta's, and as it's for a present, apparently, we'll consent to make it—three hundred guineas."

"Why *we*?" Mr. Solomons inquired, abstractedly. "I came here believing I dealt between man and man. I object to *we*. I deal with principals."

"I'll make it three hundred, then," the proprietor corrected, gravely.

"Why guineas?" Mr. Solomons went on once more, with chilly precision. "No, don't say pounds, please. That's why I ask you. Why make it guineas? You put it in guineas for people with whom you mean to strike off the odd shillings only. That won't do for me, I'm too old for that. As a basis for negotiations, if you please, we'll begin with pounds. Begin with pounds, I say, Mr. Zacharias: mind, begin, you understand—not end with them."

"Begin with three hundred and fifteen pounds?" the proprietor queried, with his small eyes blinking.

"Certainly, if you wish it," Mr. Solomons went on. "I've no objection to your putting on the extra fifteen pounds—three hundred shillings to cover the guineas—if it gives you any pleasure: as, of course, we shall only have to knock them off at once again. Well, we go on, then, to three hundred pounds for this necklet. . . . Now, Mr. Zacharias, what do you take me for?"

And then began that sharp contest of wits that Mr. Solomons delighted in, and in which Mr. Zacharias, to do him justice, was no unworthy antagonist.

The two men's eyes gleamed with the joy of the conflict as they joined in the fray. It was to them what a game of chess or a debate in the House is to keen, intellectual combatants of another order. They understood one another perfectly—too perfectly to have recourse to the petty blandishments and transparent deceptions wherewith Mr. Zacharias might have attempted to cajole an accidental purchaser. It was Greek meet Greek, diamond cut diamond. The price was to be settled, not in current coin of the realm, but in doubtful paper. And it was to be arrived at by a curious process of double bargaining, greatly to the taste of either diplomatist.

Mr. Solomons was first to bate down Mr. Zacharias to a given price, say a hundred and fifty, and Mr. Zacharias was then to bate down the doubtful bills till he had arrived at last at a proximate equation between the two sums agreeable to both parties. And to this congenial contest they both addressed their wits in high good-humour, entering into it with the zest that every man displays when pitted against a foeman just worthy of his steel, in a sport at which both are acknowledged masters.

The debate was long, exciting, and varied. But in the end the game was drawn, each side coming off with honourable scars and insignificant trophies. Mr. Solomons calculated that he had got the necklet for two hundred and forty-five pounds' worth of doubtful paper, and that it might fairly be valued at two hundred and fifty. Mr. Zacharias calculated that a knowing customer might have had the necklet for two hundred and forty-two pounds, and that the doubtful bills would probably realise, when discounted, two hundred and sixty.

So each left off well satisfied with his morning's work, besides having had a long hour's good intellectual exercise for his money.

And Mr. Solomons went away with the pleasing conviction that if Sir Paul Gascoyne, for example, had bought the necklet in the regular way at a West End jeweller's, he would no doubt have paid that enterprising tradesman the original three hundred guineas demanded for it. Of so great avail is it to a wise man to know the City.

By an odd coincidence, that very same day Paul, for his part, received three letters,

all tending greatly to disconcert his settled policy. The first two came by the morning post, the third followed by the eleven o'clock delivery. Was this design or accident? Who shall say? Fortune, that usually plays us such scurvy tricks, now and again indulges, by way of change, in a lucky coincidence.

The first of his letters Paul opened was from Fowey, where Nea was not. It was brief and paternal—the British father in his favourite character of practical common-sense, enforcing upon giddy and sentimental youth the business aspect of life as a commercial speculation. Much as the Reverend Walter Blair, Clerk in Holy Orders, esteemed the prospective honour of counting Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, as his son-in-law, he must point out to Sir Paul at last that this engagement was running to a truly preposterous length, and that some sort of effort ought to be made to terminate it. "Does that mean break it off?" Paul queried internally, with a horrible sort of alarm. But no; the next sentence reassured his startled soul as to that doubtful verb. The Reverend Walter Blair had the fullest confidence in his young friend's ability to support his daughter in a way suitable to her position in life, and would urge, on the contrary, that the marriage should be entered into—great heavens! what was this?—on the earliest opportunity! If not—the Reverend Walter Blair was conveniently vague as to what might follow upon his non-compliance: but Paul's heart went down with a very violent sinking indeed as he thought how much that paternal reticence might possibly cover. Vague visions of Nea wedded against her will (oh, boundless imagination of youth!) to a multi-faceted Cornish squire of restricted intelligence oppressed his soul. As though anybody—even a Society mother—could marry off an English girl of Nea Blair's type where she didn't wish to be married! Why, Mrs. Partington with the ocean at her doors had a comparatively wide and correct conception of character and conduct.

He broke open the second letter, posted at Sheffield, and skimmed it through hurriedly. To his immense surprise it pointed in precisely the same direction as Mr. Blair's.

Since Nea had been with her, Faith said, in simple sisterly fashion, she had noticed more than once that that dear girl was growing positively thin and ill with the harassing care of a long engagement. Nea was a dear, and would never complain; not for worlds would she add a jot to Paul's heavy burden while he had still that debt of Mr. Solomons' on his hands; but still, Faith thought, it was hard she should be wasting her golden youth when she ought to be happy and enjoy her ladyship while it would be of most satisfaction and service to her. And since Mr. Solomons himself approved of the union, as Nea told her, why, Faith, for her part, could hardly imagine what reasons could induce Paul to shilly-shally

any longer. "And Charlie says," the letter went on, "he fully agrees with me."

At eleven o'clock, to clinch it all, came a brief little note from Nea herself, design or accident:

"Dear Faith has been declaring to me for the last two days, Paul darling, that it's positively wicked of me to keep you waiting and despairing any longer; and this morning, by an odd coincidence, the enclosed note came from papa. You will see from it that he is very much in earnest indeed about the matter, and that he objects to our engagement remaining so long indefinite. So, Paul, they've easily succeeded between them at last in talking me over; and if you think as they do—

"Yours always,
"NEA."

Paul laid down the note, and reflected seriously

CHAPTER XLVII.

"PUTTING ON THE SCREW."

THE combination was too strong in the end for Paul. Faith and Nea, backed up by Mr. Solomon's advice and Mr. Blair's protest, were more than the sternest virtue could resist—especially when inclination itself lay disturbing the balance in the self-same scale. Paul wavered—and was lost. Before he knew exactly how it was all happening, he found himself the central, though secondary, figure of a domestic event. He was given to understand by all parties concerned that he had been duly selected by external destiny for the post of bridegroom in a forthcoming wedding.

And, indeed, if he continued to harbour any passing doubts upon the subject himself, the periodical literature of his country must shortly have undeceived him. For, happening to drop in at his club the next Saturday afternoon—as a journalist, Paul had regarded the luxury of membership at the Cheyne Row as a trade expense—he lighted by chance upon a paragraph of gossip in that well-known second-rate Society paper, the *Whisperer*:

"A marriage has just been arranged, and will take place early next month, between Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart., of Hillborough, and Nea Mary, only daughter of the Rev. Walter Blair, Rector of Lanhydroan, near Fowey, Cornwall. Sir Paul, though he rejoices in the dignity of a fourteenth baronet, and boasts some of the bluest blood in Glamorganshire, is by no means overwhelmed with this world's wealth; but his career at Christ Church was sufficiently distinguished, and he has since made his mark more generally as a journalist and essayist in the London Press. Unless he throws away his opportunities and wastes his talents, the new proprietor ought to do much

in time to restore the lost glories of Gascoyne Manor."

A fiery red spot burnt in Paul's cheek as he laid down the indiscreet sheet with its annoying blunders, and picked up, for a change, its rival, the *Blab* of a week later date. There, almost the first words that met his eyes were those that composed his own name, staring him in the face in that rudely obtrusive way that one's own name always does stare at one from a printed paper.

"No, no, *Arthur*," the editor of the *Blab* remarked, in his gently colloquial style to his brother chronicler; "you're out of it this time about young Gascoyne, of Christ Church. Sir Paul Emery Howard Gascoyne—to give him the full benefit of his empty title, for it carries no money—is the fifteenth—not, as you say, the fourteenth—baronet of that ancient family. He is not of Hillborough, which was only the place where his late respected papa carried on a harmless, though useful, calling, but of a decent lodging-house in Somers Row, Gower Street. He has nothing to do in any way with Gascoyne Manor, the old seat of his ancestors, which is the property of a distant and not over-friendly cousin. And if you mean to insinuate by certain stray hints about wasted opportunities and so forth and so forth, that Miss Blair, his future wife, has money of her own, allow us to assure you, on the very best authority, that the lady's face is her fortune—and a very pretty fortune, too, it might have been, if she hadn't chosen to throw it away recklessly on a penniless young journalist with a useless baronetcy. However, Sir Paul has undoubtedly youth and brains on his side, and, if you don't succeed in spoiling his style, will, no doubt, manage to pull through in the end by the aid of a pen which is more smart than gentlemanly. Give him a post on your staff outright, dear *Arthur*, and he'll exactly suit the requirements of the *Whisperer*."

Paul flung down the paper with a still angrier face. But, whatever else he felt, one thing was certain: he couldn't now delay getting married to Nea.

The opinion of others has a vast effect upon even the most individualistic amongst us. And so it came to pass that Paul Gascoyne was dragged, at last, half against his will, into marrying Nea within the month, without having ever got rid of his underlying feeling that to do so was certainly foolish and almost wicked.

The wedding was to take place at Lanhydroan, of course; and such a gathering of the clans from all parts of the world the little Cornish village had seldom witnessed! Charlie Thistleton and Faith were at Paddington to meet Paul and accompany him down; while the master-cutter and his wife, unable to avoid this further chance of identifying themselves with the Gascoyne family, were to follow in their wake half a day later. Paul was

delighted to find that Faith, whom he hadn't seen for a year, had changed less than he expected, and far less than he feared. She had expanded with the expansion in her position, to be sure, as Mr. Solomons noted, and was quite at home in her new surroundings. Less than that would be to be less a woman; but she retained all her old girlish simplicity, for all that, and she was quite as fiercely herself in sentiment as ever.

"We'll travel first," Charlie Thistleton said apologetically, "for the sake of getting a carriage to ourselves. I know you and Paul will want to have a little family confab together, after not seeing one another so long; now, won't you?"

"Oh, well, if you put it on that ground," Faith answered, mollified, "I don't mind going first just this once, to please you. Though up in the North Country, Paul, I always insist upon travelling third still, just to scandalize Charlie's grand acquaintances. When they ask me why, I always say, 'Because that's what I'm accustomed to; I never could afford to go second before I was married.' And you should just see their faces when I add quietly, 'Sir Paul and I were never rich enough to get beyond thirds, and I suppose poor Paul will have to go third as long as he lives, for he doesn't mean, like me, to marry above him.'"

"But I do," Paul answered, with a gentle smile. "I remember, when I first met dear Nea at Mentone, what an awful swell I thought her, and how dreadfully afraid I was even of talking to her."

"Well, run and get the tickets, Charlie," Mrs. Thistleton said, turning to her obedient slave; and if by any chance Mrs. Douglas is going down by this particular train, try to keep out of her way; for I want, if possible, to have my brother to myself for the last time this one long journey."

By the aid of half a crown, judiciously employed in contravening the company's regulations as to gratuities to porters, they succeeded in maintaining the desired privacy; and Faith could gossip to her heart's content with Paul about everything that had happened since their last meeting. She was particularly curious to know about Mr. Solomons—his ways and doings.

"I always thought, do you know, Paul," she said, "that, in a certain sort of queer, unacknowledged way, Mr. Solomons had an undercurrent of sneaking regard for you—a personal liking for you, and a pride in what he's made of you. I don't think it was all mere desire for your money."

"I don't know, I'm sure," Paul answered. "I've a great regard for Mr. Solomons myself. I'm sure it's to him entirely I owe my present position, such as it is. And I believe he honestly desired, in his way, to serve me. The idea of the baronetcy going to waste, as a marketable commodity, first weighed upon his

mind, of course. Whether it was his own, or whether it was somebody else's, it vexed his good commercial soul to see so much intrinsic value running away, as it were, like beer from a barrel, all for nothing. But when once he got fairly embarked in the scheme, it became an end in itself to him—his favourite idea, his pet investment; and I was a part of it: he liked me because he had made me himself. It gave him importance in his own eyes to be mixed up with the family of an English baronet."

"Oh, I'm sure he likes all your family personally," Charlie Thistleton put in, in spite of a warning look from his wife. "You should hear the way he writes to Faith about you!"

"Writes to Faith!" Paul repeated, surprised.

"Well—yes," Charlie answered, pulling himself up short with the contrite air of the husband who knows he has exceeded his wife's instructions. "He wrote a letter to Faith about you once—some months ago; and he said he was proud of the position you were making for yourself in literary London. He also remarked you were paying up arrears with pleasing promptitude."

"It's curious he makes you go on paying, and grinding you so hard," Faith mused meditatively, "when he's got nobody left on earth now to grind you for."

"It's habit!" Paul answered—"mere ingrained habit. He grinds by instinct. And he likes to feel, too, that I'm able to pay him. He likes to think his money wasn't wasted or his confidence misplaced. Though he considers me a fool for not marrying an heiress, he considers, too, it proves his own sagacity that he should have known I'd leave no stone unturned till I'd honestly repaid him."

"It's a great pity," Charlie Thistleton interposed, looking out of the window and delivering himself slowly of an abstract opinion *à propos* of nothing in particular, "that some people are so devilish proud as they are. They'd rather toil and slave and worry themselves for a lifetime, than accept paltry unimportant hundreds from their friends and a few relations."

"Oh, Charlie! he couldn't!" Faith cried, flushing up. "He wouldn't be Paul at all if he did that. I know we'd all love to help him if it was possible. But it isn't possible. Anybody who knows him knows he'll never be satisfied till he's worked it all off and paid it himself. Mr. Solomons knows it; and perhaps that's why he's so hard upon him, even. He wants to give him a spur and a stimulus to work, so that he may get it all paid off as soon as possible, and be free to do better things in the end for himself and Nea."

"My dear child," Charlie put in, "you're really too trustful."

"Well, anyhow, he wants Paul to marry Nea now," Faith said, relapsing into her corner.

"Because he thinks I'll work better when it's all settled," Paul retorted, half-undecided himself which side to take. "There's no doubt about it, Faith, he's grown harder and more money-grubbing than ever since Lionel Solomons died. He reckons every farthing and grumbles over every daisy. I suppose it's because he's got nothing else left to live for now. But he certainly grinds me hard indeed, and wants more every time, as if he was afraid he'd never live to get back his money."

"Ah, that's it, you see!" Faith answered. "That's just the explanation. While that horrid boy was alive, he expected to leave his money to him; and if Mr. Solomons himself didn't get the return, Lionel would have got it. But now, he must have it all repaid in his own lifetime, or it'll be no use to him. What does it matter to him whether the Jewish Widows and Orphans have a hundred or a thousand more or less? It's only the pursuit of money for its own sake that's left him now. He goes on with that by mere use and custom."

All the way down to Cornwall, in fact, they discussed this important matter, and others of more pressing and immediate interest; and all the way down Faith noticed that Paul was going to his wedding with many grave doubts and misgivings on his mind as to whether or not he was right at all in marrying under such circumstances. It's hard for a man to start on his honeymoon with a millstone round his neck; and Faith cordially pitied him. Yet, none the less, she was characteristically proud of him for that very feeling. Paul would have been less of a Gascoyne, she felt, if he could have accepted aid or help in such a strait from any man. He had made his own maze, no matter how long since, and now he must puzzle his own way out of it.

At Fowey Station a strange surprise awaited them. They got out of their carriage, and saw on the platform a familiar figure which quite took Faith's breath away.

"Mr. Solomons!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "You here! This is indeed"—she was just going to say "an unexpected pleasure," but native truthfulness came to her aid in time, and she substituted instead the very non-committing word "wonderful!"

Mr. Solomons, somewhat bluer in the face than was his wont, drew himself up to his full height of five feet five as he extended his hand to her with a cordial welcome. He had never looked so blooming before since poor Leo's death. Nor had Faith ever seen him so closely resemble a well-to-do solicitor. He had spared no pains or expense, indeed, on his sartorial get-up. All that the tailor's art and skill could do had been duly done for him. He was faultlessly attired in positively neat and gentlemanly clothes; for he had put himself implicitly in the hands of a good West End house; and, distrusting his own taste and that of his race, had asked to be dressed from head to foot in a style suitable for a baronet's

wedding-party. The result was really and truly surprising. Mr. Solomons, with a flower in his button-hole, and a quiet tie round his neck, looked positively almost like a Jewish gentleman.

"Well, yes, Mrs. Thistleton," the old money-lender said, with a deep-blue blush, "I fancied you'd be rather taken aback when you saw me. It isn't every day that I get an invitation to a wedding in high life; but Miss Blair was kind enough to send me a card; and I thought, as I was one of Sir Paul's oldest and earliest friends, I could hardly let the occasion pass without properly honouring it. So I've taken rooms by telegraph at the hotel in the town; and I hope to see you all by-and-bye at the church on Thursday."

The apparition was hardly a pleasant one for Paul. If the truth must be confessed, he would have liked, if possible, on that one day in his life, if never before or after, to be free from the very shadow of Mr. Solomons' presence. But Nea had no doubt good reasons of her own for asking him—Nea was always right—and so Paul grasped his old visitor's hand as warmly as he could, as he muttered in a somewhat choky and dubious voice a half-inarticulate "Thank you!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. SOLOMONS COMES OUT.

THE wedding-day came, and the gathering of the clans at Lanhydran Church was indeed conspicuous. Mrs. Douglas was there from Oxford (with the Arcadian Professor well in tow), discoursing amicably to Faith of the transcendent merits of blue blood, and of how perfectly certain she was that, sooner or later, Paul would take his proper place in Parliament, and astonish the world with some magnificent scheme for Imperial Federation, or for the Total Abolition of Poverty and Crime in Great Britain and Ireland. The Thistletons senior were there, looking bland and impressive, with the consciousness of having given the bride a handsome present as anybody else in all the wedding-party was likely to bestow upon her. Half a dozen of Paul's undergraduate friends or London acquaintances had come down to grace the ceremony by their august presence, or to make copy for Society papers out of the two young people's felicity. The county of Cornwall was there in full force to see a pretty Cornish girl recruit the ranks of metropolitan aristocracy.

And Mr. Solomons was there, with hardly a trace of that cold, hard manner left upon his face, and his fingers finding their way with a fumbling twitch every now and again to his right coat-tail pocket, which evidently contained some unknown object to whose continued safety Mr. Solomons attached immense, and indeed overwhelming, importance.

As for Nea, she looked as charming as ever—as charming, Paul thought, as on that very

first day when he had seen her and fallen in love with her on the promenade at Mentone. And when at last, in the vestry, after all was over, he was able to print one kiss on her smooth white forehead, and to say, "my wife" in real earnest, he forgot all other thoughts in the joy of that name, and felt as though Mr. Solomons and his hapless claims had never existed.

Mr. Solomons himself, however, was by no means disposed to let the opportunity pass by so easily. As soon as everybody had signed the book and claimed the customary kiss from the bride, Mr. Solomons, too, pressed forward with a certain manifest eagerness on his impulsive countenance. He took Nea's two hands in his own with a fatherly air, and clasped them for a moment, tremulous with emotion.

Nea held up her blushing cheek timidly. Mr. Solomons drew back. A maiden fear oppressed his soul. This was too much honour. He had never expected it.

"Dare I, my lady?" he asked, in a faltering voice.

He was the first who had called her so. Nea replied with a smile and a deeper blush. Mr. Solomons leant forward with instinctive courtesy, and, bending his head, just touched with pursed-up lips that dainty small hand of hers.

It was the greatest triumph of his life—a reward for that doubtful and dangerous long investment. That he should live to kiss with his own two lips the hand of the lady of an English baronet!

As he rose again, blushing bluer in the face than ever, he drew from his pocket a large morocco case, and taking out of it a necklace of diamonds set in gold, he hung them gracefully round Nea's neck with an unobtrusive movement. A chorus of admiring "Ohs!" went up all round from the circling group of women. Mr. Solomons had loosed his little bolt neatly. He had chosen the exact right moment for presenting his wedding gift. Even old Mr. Thistleton, complacent and urbane, was taken aback by the shimmering glitter of the pretty baubles, and reflected with some chagrin that his own set of massive silver dessert-dishes was thrown quite into the shade now by Mr. Solomons' diamonds.

Paul was the only person who failed to appreciate the magnificence of the present. He saw, indeed, with surprise that Mr. Solomons had presented Nea with a very pretty necklace. But beyond that vague feeling he realised nothing. He was too simply a man to attach much importance to those useless gewgaws.

The breakfast followed, with its usual accompaniments of champagne and speeches. The ordinary extraordinary virtues were discovered in the bridegroom, and the invariably exceptional beauty and sweetness of the bride met with their due meed of extravagant praise. Nothing could be more satisfactory than everyone's opinion of everyone else. All the world had always known that Sir Paul would attain

in the end to the highest honours literature could hold out to her ambitious aspirants—perhaps even to the editorship of the *Times* newspaper. All the world had always considered that Lady Gascoyne—how Nea sat there blushing and tingling with delight as she heard that long-expected title now really and truly at last bestowed upon her—deserved exactly such a paragon of virtue, learning, and talent as the man who had that day led her to the altar. Everybody said very nice things about the bridesmaids and their probable fate in the near future. Everybody was polite, and appreciative, and eulogistic, so that all the world seemed converted for the moment into a sort of private Lanhydrohan Mutual Admiration Society, Limited, and believed as such, with unblushing confidence.

At last, Mr. Solomons essayed to speak. It was in answer to some wholly unimportant toast; and as he rose he really looked even more like a gentleman, Faith thought to herself, than at the station last evening. He put his hand upon the table to steady himself, and gazed long at Paul. Then he cleared his throat and began nervously, in a low tone that was strangely unfamiliar to him. He said a few words, not without a certain simple dignity of their own, about the immediate subject to which he was supposed to devote his oratorical powers; but in the course of half a minute he had wandered round to the bridegroom, as is the oblique fashion with most amateur speakers on these trying occasions.

"I have known Sir Paul Gascoyne," he said, and Faith, watching him hard, saw with surprise that tears stood in his eyes, "ever since his head wouldn't have shown above this table. He paused a second and glanced once more at Paul. "I've always known him," he continued, in a very shaky voice, "for what he is—a gentleman. There's no truer man than Sir Paul Gascoyne in all England. Once I had a boy of my own—a nephew—but my own—I loved him dearly." He paused once more, and struggled with his emotion. "Now I've nobody left me but Sir Paul," he went on, his eyes swimming, "and I love Sir Paul as I never could have loved any—any—any—"

Faith rose and caught him. Mr. Solomons was bluer in the face now than ever before. He gasped for breath, staggered as he spoke, and accepted Faith's arm with gratitude.

"Dear Mr. Solomons," Faith said, supporting him, "you'd better sit down now, at once—hadn't you?"

"Yes, yes, my dear," Mr. Solomons cried, bursting all of a sudden into hasty tears, more eloquent than his words, and subsiding slowly. "I've always said, and I shall always say, that your brother Paul's the very best young fellow in all England."

And he sank into his seat.

Have you ever noticed that, after all's over, the bride and bridegroom, becoming suddenly

conscious that they're terribly faint, and have eaten and drunk nothing themselves owing to the tempest and whirlwind of congratulations, invariably retire in the end to the deserted dining-room, with three or four intimate friends, for a biscuit and a glass of claret? In that position Paul and Nea found themselves half an hour later, with Faith and Thistleton to keep them company.

"But what does this all mean about Mr. Solomons?" Faith inquired in an undertone. "Did you ever see anything so queer and mysterious as his behaviour?"

"Why, I don't know about that," Paul answered. "I saw nothing very odd in it. He has always known me, of course, and he was naturally pleased to see me so well married."

"Well, but Paul dear," Faith exclaimed impressively, "just think of the necklet!"

"The necklet!" Paul answered in a careless tone. "Oh, yes, the necklet was very pretty."

"But what did he mean by giving it to her?" Faith asked once more in an excited whisper. "I think, myself, it's awfully symptomatic."

"Symptomatic?" Paul echoed inquiringly.

"Why, yes," Faith repeated. "Symptomatic, of course. Such a lovely present as that! What on earth else could he possibly give it to her for?"

"Everybody who comes to a wedding gives the bride a present, don't they?" Paul asked, a little mystified. "I always thought, after we got him at Cowey Station, Mr. Solomons would give a present to Nea. He's the sort of man who likes things done decently and in order. He'd make a point of giving tithe of mint, anise, and cummin."

"Mint, anise, and cummin!" Faith retorted contemptuously. "Why, what do you think that necklet would cost, you stupid?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Paul answered; "about five pounds, I suppose."

"Five pounds!" the two women repeated in concert, with a burst of amusement.

"Why, Paul, dear," Nea went on, taking it off and handing it to him, "that necklet must have cost at least three hundred guineas the set—at least three hundred!"

Paul turned it over dubiously, with an awestruck air.

"Are you sure, Nea?" he asked incredulously.

"Quite sure, dear," Nea answered. "And so's Faith; aren't you, Faith?"

Faith nodded acquiescence.

"Well, all I can say," Paul replied, examining the thing closely with astonished eyes, "is—it doesn't look worth it."

"Oh, yes!" Faith put in, admiring it, all enthusiasm. "Why, they're just lovely, Paul. It's the most beautiful necklet I ever saw anywhere."

"But what did he do it for?" Paul asked in amaze. It was his turn now to seek in vain for some hidden motive.

"Ah, that's the question," Charlie Thistleton continued with a blank stare. "I suppose he thought Lady Gascoyne ought to have jewels worthy of her position."

"I don't know," Paul went on, drawing his hand across his brow with a puzzled air. "If it's worth what you say, it's one of the strangest things I ever heard. Three hundred pounds! Why, that'd be a lot of money for anybody to spend upon it."

To say the truth, he looked at the diamonds a trifle ruefully. In the first flush of surprise he almost wondered whether, when he next called round at the High Street, Hillborough, Mr. Solomons would want him to sign another bond for three hundred pounds, with interest at twenty per cent. per annum, for jewellery supplied for Lady Gascoyne's wedding.

At that moment a flutter in the coterie disturbed him. He roused himself from his reverie to see Mr. Solomons gazing in at the open door, evidently pleased at the attention bestowed upon his treasured diamonds.

Nea looked up at him with that sunny smile of hers. "We're all admiring your lovely present, Mr. Solomons," she said, dangling it once more before him.

Mr. Solomons came in, still very blue in the face, and took her two hands affectionately in his, as he had done in the vestry.

"My dear," he said, gazing at her with a certain paternal pride, "when I first knew Sir Paul was going to marry you, or was thinking of marrying you, I won't pretend to deny I was very much disappointed. I thought he ought to have looked elsewhere for money—money. I wanted him to marry a woman of wealth. . . . My dear, I was wrong—I was quite wrong. Sir Paul was a great deal wiser in his generation than I was. He knew something that was better far than money." He drew a deep sigh. "I could wish," he went on, holding her hands tight, "that all those I loved had been as wise as he is. Since I saw you, my dear, I've appreciated his motives. I won't say I'm not disappointed now—to say merely that would be poor politeness—I'm happy and proud at the choice he's made—I, who am—perhaps—well—your husband's oldest and nearest friend."

He gazed across at her once more, tenderly, gently. Paul was surprised to find the old man had so much chivalry left in him still. Then he leaned forward yet a second time and kissed her hand with old-fashioned courtesy.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said, pressing it.

"Good-bye, Sir Paul; I've a train to catch, for I've business in London—important business in London—and I thought I'd better go up by the train before the one you and Lady Gascoyne have chosen. But I wanted to say good-bye to you both quietly in here before I went. My child, this is the proudest day I ever remember. I've mixed on equal terms with the gentfolk of England. I'm not unmindful of all the kindness and sympathy you've all extended

this morning to an old Jew money-lender. My own have never been to me as you and Paul have been to-day." He burst into tears again. "From my heart I thank you, my dear," he cried out, falteringly; "from my poor old, worn-out, broken-down heart, ten thousand times I thank you."

And before Paul in his amazement could blurt out a single word in reply he had kissed her hand again with hot tears falling on it, and glided from the door towards the front entry. Next minute he was walking down the garden-path to the gate, erect and sturdy, but crying to himself as he had never cried in his life before since Lionel betrayed him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

TO PARIS AND BACK, SIXTY SHILLINGS.

A JOURNALIST'S holiday is always short. Paul had arranged for a fortnight away from London—he could afford no more—and to that brief span he had to cut down his honeymoon. But he was happy now in his full possession of Nea—too happy, indeed, when all was irrevocably done, even to think of the shadow of those outlying claims that still remained unsatisfied in the safe at Hillborough.

In a fortnight a man can't go very far. So Paul was content to take his bride across to Paris. On their way back he meant to stop for a couple of nights at Hillborough, where he could do his work as well as in town, so that Nea might make his mother's acquaintance. For Mrs. Gascoyne had wisely refused to be present at the wedding. She preferred, she said, to know Paul's wife more quietly afterwards, when Nea could take her as she was, and know her for herself, without feeling ashamed of her before her fine relations.

It was late autumn, and the town was delightful. To both Paul and Nea, Paris was equally new ground, and they revelled, as young people will, before they know any better, in the tawdry delights of that meretricious capital. Don't let us blame them, we who are older and wiser and have found out Paris. At their age, remember, we, too, admired its glitter and its din; we, too, were taken in by its cheap impressiveness; and we, too, had not risen above the common vulgarities of the boulevards and the Bois and the Champs Elysées. We found in the Français that odious form of entertainment—"an intellectual treat"; and we really believed in the Hausmannesque monstrosities that adorn its streets as constituting what we called, in the gibberish of our heyday, "a very fine city." If we know better now—if we understand that a Devonshire lane is worth ten thousand Palais Royals, and a talk under the trees with a pretty girl is sweeter than all the tants of iniquity—let us, at least, refrain from flaunting our more excellent way before the eyes of a giddy Philistine world, and let us pardon youth in the flush of its honey-

moon, a too ardent attachment to the Place de la Concorde and the Magasins du Louvre.

Yet, oh, those Magasins du Louvre! How many heartburns they caused poor Paul! And with what unconscious cruelty did Nea drag him through the endless corridors of the Bon Marché on the other side of the water.

"What a lovely silk! Oh, what exquisite gloves! And how charming that chair would look, Paul, wouldn't it? in our drawing-room in London, whenever we get one."

Ah, yes, whenever! For Paul now began to feel, as he had never felt in his life before, the sting of his poverty. How he longed to give Nea all these beautiful gewgaws; and how impossible he knew it! If only Nea could have realised the pang she gave him each time she admired those pretty frocks and those delightful hats, and those exquisite things in Persian or Indian carpets, she would have cut out her own tongue before she mentioned them. For it was to be their fate for the present to live in lodgings in London till that greedy Mr. Solomons was finally appeased, and even then they would have to save up for months and months before they were in a position to furnish their humble cottage, not with Persian rugs and carved oak chairs, but with plain Kidderminster and a good deal suite from the extensive showrooms of the Tottenham Court Road cabinet-maker.

Revolving these things in his mind, on the day before their return to dear foggy old England, Paul was strolling with Nea down the Champs Elysées, and thinking about nothing else in particular, when suddenly a bow and a smile from his wife, delivered towards a fiacre that rolled along in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe, distracted his attention from his internal cogitations to the mundane show then passing before him. He turned and looked. A lady in the fiacre, remarkably well dressed, and pretty enough as forty-five goes, returned the bow and smile; and vainly tried to stop the cabman, who heeded not her expostulatory parasol thrust hastily towards him.

For a moment Paul failed to recognise that perfectly well-bred and glassy smile. The lady was so charmingly got up as almost to defy detection from her nearest friend. Then, next instant, as the tortoiseshell eyeglasses transfixed him with their glance, he started and knew her. That face he had seen last the day when Lionel Solomons was buried. It was none other than the Carlota!

In an agony of alarm he seized his wife's arm. He could never again permit his spotless Nea to be contaminated by that horrible woman's hateful presence. Why, if she succeeded in turning the cab in time to meet them, the creature would actually try to kiss Nea before his very eyes—she, that vile woman whose villainess he had thoroughly felt on the evening of poor Lionel Solomons' funeral.

"Nea, darling," he cried, hurrying her along

with his hand on her arm, "come as fast as you can: I don't want that woman there to stop and speak to you!"

"Why, it's Madame!" Nea answered, a little surprised. "I don't care for her, of course; but it seems so unfriendly—and just now above all—to deliberately cut her!"

"I can't help it," Paul answered. "My darling, she's not fit company for you."

And then, taking her aside along the alley at the back, beyond the avenue and the merry-go-rounds, he explained to her briefly what she already knew in outline at least, the part they all believed Madame Ceriolo to have borne in luring on Lionel Solomons to his last awful enterprise.

"What's she doing in Paris, I wonder?" Nea observed reflectively, as they walked on down that less-frequented path towards the Rue de Rivoli.

"I'm sure I don't know," Paul answered. "She seemed very well dressed. She must have some sources of income nobody knows of. She couldn't afford to drive about in a carriage like that on the strength of Mr. Solomons' allowance of two hundred."

Nea shook her head emphatically.

"Oh dear no!" she answered, "not anything like it. Why, she's dressed in the very height of fashion. Her mantle alone must have cost every bit of twenty guineas."

"It's curious," Paul murmured in reply. "I never can understand these people's budget. They seem to pick up money wherever they go. They've no visible means of subsistence, to speak of, yet they live on the fat of the land and travel about as much as they've a fancy to."

"It's luck," Nea answered. "And dishonesty, too, perhaps. One might always be rich if one didn't care how one got one's money."

By the Place de la Concorde, oddly enough, they stumbled across another old Mentone acquaintance. It was Armitage, looking a trifle less spick-and-span than formerly, to be sure, but still wearing in face, coat, and head-gear the air of an accomplished *boulevardier*.

He struck an attitude the moment he saw them, and extended a hand of most unwonted cordiality. One would have said from his manner that the scallywag had been the bosom-friend of his youth, and the best-beloved companion of his maturer years—so affectionate and so warm was his greeting.

"What, Gascogne!" he cried, coming forward and seizing his hand. "You here, my dear fellow! And Lady Gascogne, too! Well, this is delightful! I saw all about your marriage in the *Whisperr*, you know, and that you had started for Paris, and I was so pleased to think it was I in great part who had done you the good turn of first bringing you and Lady Gascogne together. Well, this is indeed a pleasure—a most fortunate meeting! I've been hunting up and down for you at every

hotel in all Paris—the Grand, the Continental, the Windsor, the Ambassadors—but I couldn't find you anywhere. You seem to have buried yourself. I wanted to take you to this reception at the Embassy."

"You're very kind," Paul answered in a reserved tone, for such new-born affection somewhat repelled him by its *empressment*. "We've taken rooms in a very small hotel behind the Palais de l'Industrie. We're poor, you know. We couldn't afford to stop at such places as the Grand or the Continental."

Armitage alighted his arm irresistibly into Paul's. "I'll walk with you wherever you're going," he said. "It's such a pleasure to meet you both again. And how long, Lady Gascogne, do you remain in Paris?"

Nea told him, and Armitage, drawing down the corners of his mouth at the news, regretted their departure excessively. There were so many things coming off this next week, don't you know. And the Lyttons would of course be so delighted to get them an invitation for that crush at the Elysées."

"We don't care for crushes, thanks," Paul responded frigidly.

"And who do you think we saw just now, up near the Rond Pointe, Mr. Armitage?" Nea put in, with perfect innocence. "Why, Madame Ceriolo."

"Got up younger than ever," Paul went on with a smile.

It was Armitage's turn to draw himself up now. "I beg your pardon," he said stiffly, "but I think—a—you labour under a misapprehension. Her name's not Ceriolo any longer, you know. Perhaps I ought to have explained before. The truth is, you see"—he stroked his beard fondly—"well—to cut it short—in point of fact, she's married."

"Oh yes, we all know that," Paul answered with a careless wave of the hand. "She's Mrs. Lionel Solomons now, by rights, we're well aware. I was present at her husband's funeral. But, of course, she won't be guilty of such an egregious piece of folly as calling herself by her new name. Ceriolo's a better name to trade upon than Solomons, any day."

Armitage dropped his arm—a baronet's arm—with a little sudden movement, and blushed brilliant crimson.

"Oh, I don't mean *that*," he said, looking just a little sheepish. "Marie's told me all that, I need hardly say. It was a hasty episode—mistaken, mistaken! Poor child! I don't blame her, she was so alone in the world—she needed companionship. I ought to have known it. And the old brute of an uncle behaved most shamefully to her, too, afterwards. But no matter about that. It's a long story. Happily, Marie's a person not easily crushed. . . . What I meant was this. I thought—perhaps you'd have seen it in the papers." And he pulled out from his card-case a little printed paragraph which he handed to Paul. "She was married at the

Embassy, you see," he went on, still more sheepishly than before. "Married at the Embassy, the very same day as you and Lady Gascoyne. In point of fact, the lady you were speaking of is at this present moment—Mrs. Armitage."

"So she's caught you at last," was what Paul nearly blurted out in his astonishment on the spur of the moment, but with an effort he refrained and restrained himself. "I'm sorry I should have said anything," he replied instead, "that might for a moment seem disrespectful to the lady you've made your wife. You may be sure I wouldn't have done so had I in the least anticipated it."

"Oh, that's all right," Armitage answered, a little crestfallen, but with genial tolerance, like one well accustomed to such trifling criticisms. "It doesn't surprise me in the least that you misjudge Marie. Many people misjudge her who don't know her well. I misjudged her once myself, I'm free to confess, as I dare say you remember. But I know better now. You see, it was difficult at first to accept her romantic story in full—such stories are so often a mere tissue of falsehoods—but it's all quite true in her case. I've satisfied myself on that point. She's put my mind quite at ease as to the real position of her relations in the Tyrol. They're most distinguished people, I assure you, the Ceriolo's of Ceriolo—most distinguished people. She's lately inherited a very small fortune from one of them—just a couple of hundred a year or thereabouts. And with her little income and my little income, we mean to get along now very comfortably on the Continent. Marie's a great favourite in Society in Paris, you know. If you and Lady Gascoyne were going to stop a week longer here, I'd ask you to dine with us to meet the world at our flat in the Avenue Victor Hugo."

And when Armitage had dropped them opposite *Galignani's*, Paul observed with a quiet smile to Nea:

"Well, she's made the best, anyhow, of poor Mr. Solomons' unwilling allowance."

CHAPTER L.

A FALL IN CENTRAL SOUTHERNS.

THE shortest honeymoon ends at last (for, of course, the longest one does), and Paul and Nea were expected back one Thursday afternoon at home at Hillborough.

That day Mr. Solomons was all agog with excitement. He was ashamed to let even his office-boy see how much he anticipated Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne's arrival. He had talked of Sir Paul, indeed, till he was fairly angry with himself. It was Sir Paul here, Sir Paul there, Sir Paul everywhere. He had looked out Sir Paul's train half a dozen times over in his dog-eared Bradshaw, and had then sent out his clerk for another—a new one—for fear the service Sir Paul had written about

might be taken off the Central Southern timetable for September.

At last, by way of calming his jerky nerves, he determined to walk over the Knoll and down upon the station, where he would be the first to welcome Lady Gascoyne to Hillborough. And he set out well in time, so as not to have to mount the steep hill too fast; for the front of the hill is very steep indeed, and Mr. Solomons' heart was by no means so vigorous as its owner could have wished it to be.

However, by dint of much puffing and panting, Mr. Solomons reached the top at last, and sat down awhile on the dry turf, looking particularly blue about the lips and cheeks, to gain a little breath and admire for the fiftieth time that beautiful outlook. And well he might; for the view from the Knoll is one of the most famous among the Surrey Hills.

On one side you gaze down upon the vale of Hillborough, with its tall church spire and town of red-tiled roofs, having the station in the foreground, and the long, steep line of the North Downs at their escarpment backing it up behind with a sheer wall of precipitous greensward. On the other side you look away across the Sussex Weald, blue and level as the sea, or bounded only on its further edge by the purple summits of the Forest Ridge to southward. Close by, the Central Southern Railway, coming from Hipsley, intersects with its hard iron line a gorse-clad common, and, passing by a tunnel under the sandstone hog's back of the Knoll, emerges at once on Hillborough Station, embosomed in the beeches and elms of Boldwood Manor.

Mr. Solomons paused and gazed at it long. There was Hipsley, distinct on the common southwards, with a train at the platform bound in the opposite direction, and soon Sir Paul's train would reach there too, bringing Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne to Hillborough.

The old money-lender smiled a pitying smile to himself as he thought how eagerly and how childish he expected them. How angry he had been with Paul at first for throwing himself away upon that penniless Cornish girl! and now how much more than pleased he felt that his *protégé* had chosen the better part, and not, like Demas and poor Lionel, turned aside from the true way to a fallacious silver-mine.

"He's a good boy, Paul is," the old man thought to himself, as he got up from the turf once more, and set out to walk across the crest of the Knoll and down upon the station. "He's a good boy, Paul, and it's I who have made him."

He walked forward awhile, ruminating, along the top of the ridge, hardly looking where he went, till he came to the point just above the tunnel. There he suddenly stumbled. Something unexpected knocked against his foot, though the greensward on the top was always so fine and clean and close-cropped. It jarred him for a moment, so sudden was the shock.



"It was the greatest triumph of his life."

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Mr. Solomons, blue already, grew bluer still as he halted and held his hand to his head for a second to steady his impressions. Then he looked down to see what could have lain in his path. Good heavens! this was queer! He rubbed his eyes. "Never saw anything like this on the top of the Knoll before. God bless me!"

There was a hollow or pit into which he had stepped inadvertently, some six to eight inches or thereabouts below the general level.

As he looked he saw the land give yet more suddenly towards the centre. Hardly realizing even then what was taking place before his very eyes, he had still presence of mind enough left to jump aside from the dangerous spot, and scramble back again to the solid bank beyond it. Just as he did so, the whole mass caved in with a hollow noise, and left a funnel-shaped hole in the very centre.

Mr. Solomons, dazed and stunned, knew, nevertheless, what had really happened. The tunnel—that suspected tunnel—had fallen in. The brick roof, perhaps, had given way, or the arch had failed somewhere; but of one thing he was certain—the tunnel had fallen.

As a matter of fact, the engineers reported afterwards, rainfall had slowly carried away the sandstone of the hill, a grain at a time, by stream and rivulet, till it had left a hollow space overhead between rock and vaulting. Heavy showers had fallen the night before, and, by water-logging the soil, had added to the weight of the superincumbent strata. Cohesion no longer sufficed to support the mass; it caved in slowly; and at the very moment when Mr. Solomons saved himself on the firm soil at the side, it broke down the brickwork and filled in the tunnel.

But of all this Mr. Solomons for the moment was ignorant. Any other man in his place would probably have thought at once of the danger to life and limb by this sudden catastrophe. Mr. Solomons, looking at it with the eye of the speculator and the ingrained habits of so many years of money-grubbing, saw in it instinctively but one prospective fact—a certain fall in Central Southern's.

Nobody but he was in possession of that important fact now; he held it as his own—a piece of indubitable special information. By to-morrow morning, all the Stock Exchanges would know it. Everybody would be aware that a large tunnel on the main line of the Central Southern had fallen in; that traffic would be entirely suspended for six months at least; that the next half-yearly dividend would be *nil*, or thereabouts; and that a very large sum must come out of the reserve-fund for the task of shoring up so considerable a subsidence. Mr. Solomons chuckled to himself with pardonable delight. To-day, Central Southern's were 98½ for the account; to-morrow, he firmly believed, they would be down to 90. It was an enormous fall. Think what he stood to win by it! Just at first his only idea was to wire up to town and sell all the stock he actually

possessed, buying in again after the fall at the reduced quotation. But in another moment his business-like mind saw another and still grander prospect opening out before him. Why limit himself to the sum he could gain over his own shares? Why not sell out any amount for which he could find buyers—for the account, of course?—in other words, why not agree to deliver Central Southern's to any extent next week for 98½, when he knew that by that time he could buy as many as ever he wanted for something like 90? To a man of Mr. Solomons' type the opening was a glorious one.

In a second of time, in the twinkling of an eye, vast visions of wealth floated vaguely before him. With three hours' start of such information as that, any fellow who chose could work the market successfully and make as many thousands as he wished, without risk or difficulty. If buyers could be found, there was no reason, indeed, why he shouldn't sell out at current prices the entire stock of the Central Southern on spec; it would be easy enough to-morrow to buy it all back again at eight or nine discount. So wonderful a chance seldom falls so pat in the way of a man of business. It would be next door to criminal not to seize upon such a brilliant opportunity of fortune. In the interests of his heirs and executors, Mr. Solomons felt called upon to run for it immediately. He set off running down the Knoll at once, in the direction of Hillborough Station, lying snug in the valley among the elms and beeches below there. There was a telegraph office at the station, and thence Mr. Solomons designed to wire to London. He would instruct his broker to sell as many Central Southern A's for the account as the market would take, and, if necessary, to sell a point or two below the current Stock Exchange quotations.

Blown as he was with mounting the hill, and puffed with running, it was hard work that spurt—but the circumstances demanded it. Thousands were at stake. For the sake of his heirs and executors he felt he must run the risk with that shaky old heart of his.

Panting and blowing, he reached the bottom of the hill, and looked into the mouth of the tunnel, through which, as a rule, you could see daylight from the side towards Hipsley. The change from the accustomed sight gave him a shock of surprise. Thirty or forty yards from the entrance the tunnel was entirely blocked by a rough mass of *débris*. If a train came through now there would be a terrible smash. And in that case Central Southern's would fall still lower—what with compensation and so forth—perhaps as low as 86-87.

If a train came through there would be a terrible smash. The down-train would have just got off before the fall. The up-train would be coming very soon now. . . . And Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne would be in it!

With a burst of horror, Mr. Solomons realized at last that aspect of the case which to

almost anyone else would have been the first to present itself. There was danger to life and limb in the tunnel! Men and women might be mangled, crushed, and killed. And among them would, perhaps, be Paul and Nea!

The revelation was terrible, horrible, ghastly. Mr. Solomons pulled himself together with a painful pull. The first thing to do was to warn the station-master, and prevent an accident. The next thing was to wire to London, and sell out for the account all his Central Southern.

Sell out Central Southern! Pah! What did that matter? Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne were in the up-train. Unless he made haste, all, all would be lost. He would be left in his old age more desolate than ever. The new bubble would burst as awfully as the old one.

Fired with this fresh idea, Mr. Solomons rushed forward once more, bluer, bluer than ever, and hurried towards the station, in a bee-line, regardless of the information vouchsafed by the notice-boards that trespassers would be prosecuted. He ran as if his life depended upon his getting there. At all hazards he must warn them to stop the train at Hipsley Station.

By the gate of a meadow he paused for a second to catch his breath and mop his forehead. A man was at work there, turning manure with a fork. Mr. Solomons was blown. He called out loudly to the man, "Hi, you there! come here, will you?"

The man turned round and touched his hat respectfully.

"The Knoll tunnel's fallen in!" Mr. Solomons blurted out between his convulsive bursts of breath.

The man stuck his fork in the ground and stared stolidly in the direction indicated.

"So it hev," he murmured. "Well, naow, that's curious."

Mr. Solomons recognised him for the stolid fool of a rustic that he was. Drawing out his purse he took from it a sovereign, which he dangled temptingly. "Take this," he cried, "and run as fast as you can to the Hillborough Station. Tell the station-master the Knoll tunnel has fallen in. Tell him to telegraph to Hipsley and stop the up-train. For God's sake go, or we shall have an accident!"

In his dull, remote way, urged on by the sovereign, the man took it in—slowly, slowly, slowly; and, as soon as the facts had penetrated through his thick skull, began to run at the top of his speed over hedges and ditches towards the gate of the station.

"Tell him to telegraph at once," Mr. Solomons shouted. "The tunnel's blocked; there'll be loss of life unless he looks sharp."

And then, having recovered his breath a bit himself, he crossed the gate and proceeded to follow him. There would still be time to realize that fortune by selling out close at existing prices.

Next instant, with another flash of inspiration, it came across his mind that he had done

the wrong thing. No use at all to give warning at Hillborough. The wires went over the tunnel, and he remembered now that the pole had fallen and snapped them in the midst at the moment of the subsidence. There was no communication at all with Hipsley. It was towards Hipsley itself he ought to have gone in the first place. He must go there now, all blown as he was—go there at all hazards. He must warn the train, or Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne would be killed in the tunnel!

It came upon him with all the sudden clearness of a revelation. There was no time to wait or think. He must turn and act upon it. In a second he had clambered over the gate once more, and, blue and hot in the face, was mounting the Knoll with incredible haste for his weight and age, urged on by his wild desire to save Paul and Nea.

He struggled and scrambled up the steep face of the hill with eager feet. At the top he paused a moment, and panted for breath. The line lies straight in view across the long flat weald. From that panoramic point he could see clearly beneath him the whole level stretch of the iron road. A cloud of white steam sped merrily across the open lowland. It was the up-train on its way to Hipsley!

No time now to stop it before it left the station! But by descending at once on the line and running along upon the six-foot way, he might still succeed in attracting the engine-driver's attention and checking the train before it reached the tunnel.

CHAPTER LI.

A CATASTROPHE.

Fired with this thought, and utterly absorbed in his fears for Paul's and Nea's safety, Mr. Solomons hurried down the opposite slope of the ridge, and, scrambling through the cutting, gained the side of the railway. It was fenced in by one of those atrocious barbed-wire fences with which the selfishness of squires or farmers is still permitted to outrage every sentiment of common humanity; but Mr. Solomons was too full of his task to mind those barbarous spikes; with torn clothes and bleeding hands he squeezed himself through somehow, and ran madly along the line in the direction of Hipsley.

As he did so, the loud snort of a steam-whistle fell upon his ear, away over in front of him. His heart sank. He knew it was the train leaving Hipsley Station.

Still he ran on wildly. He must run and run till he dropped now. No time to pause or draw breath. It was necessary to give the engine-driver ample warning beforehand, so that he might put on the brake some time before reaching the mouth of the tunnel. If not, the train would dash into it at full speed, and not a living soul might survive the collision.

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might, waving his hands frantically above his head towards the approaching train, and doing his best in one last frenzied effort to catch the driver's eye before it was too late. His face was flushed purple with exertion now, and his breath came and went with deadly difficulty. But on he ran, unheeding the warnings of that throbbing heart, unheeding the short, sharp snorts of the train as it advanced, unheeding anything on earth save the internal consciousness of that one imperative duty laid on him. The universe summed itself up to his mind in that moment as a vast and absorbing absolute necessity to save Paul and Nea.

On, on the wild engine came, puffing and snorting terribly; but Mr. Solomons, nothing daunted, on fire with his exertions, almost flung himself in its path, and shrieked aloud, with his hands tossed up and his face purple.

"Stop! stop! For God's sake, stop! Stop! stop! I tell you!" He ran along backwards now, still fronting the train. "Stop! stop!" he cried, gesticulating fiercely to the astonished driver. "For heaven's sake, stop! You can't go on—there's danger!"

The engine-driver put on the brake and the train began to slow. A jar thrilled through the carriages from end to end. With a sudden effort, the guard, now thoroughly roused to a sense of danger, had succeeded in stopping it at the very mouth of the tunnel.

Mr. Solomons, almost too spent to utter a word, shrieked out at the top of his voice, in gasping syllables: "The tunnel's fallen in. You can't go on. Put back to Hipsley. I've come to warn you!"

But there was no need for him to explain any further now. The driver, looking ahead, could see for himself a mass of yellow sand obstructing the way a hundred yards in front. Slowly he got down and examined the road.

"That was a narrow squeak, Bill," he said, turning to the stoker, "if it hadn't been for the old gentleman, we'd all 'a been in kingdom come by this time!"

"He looks very queer," the stoker observed, gazing close at Mr. Solomons, who had seated himself now on the bank by the side, and was panting heavily with bluer face than ever.

"He's run too 'ard, that's where it is," the engine-driver went on, holding him up and supporting him. "Come along, sir; come on in the train with us. We've got to go back to Hipsley now, that's certain."

But Mr. Solomons only gasped, and struggled hard for breath. A terrible wave convulsed his features.

"Loosen his collar, Jim," the stoker suggested. The engine-driver obeyed, and Mr. Solomons seemed to breathe more freely.

"Now then, what's the matter? Why don't we go on?" a bluff man cried, putting his head out of a first-class carriage window.

"Matter enough, sir," the engine-driver answered. "Tunnel's broke; road's blocked ahead; and this gentleman by the side's a-dying."

"Dying!" the bluff personage echoed, descending quickly from his seat, and joining the group. "No, no; not that! . . . Don't talk such nonsense! . . . Why, God bless my soul, so he is, to be sure! Valvular disease of the heart, that's what I make it. Have you got any brandy, boys? Leave him to me. I'll attend to him. I'm a doctor."

"Run along the train, Bill, the engine-driver said, "and ask if any gentleman's got a flask of brandy."

In a minute the stoker returned, followed close by Paul, who brought a little flask, which he offered for the occasion.

"'Old up the gen'leman's 'ead, Jim," the stoker said, "and pour down some brandy."

Paul started with horror and amazement.

"Why," he cried, "it's Mr. Solomons!"

Mr. Solomons opened his eyes for an instant. His throat gurgled.

"Good-bye, Sir Paul," he said, trying feebly to grope for something in his pocket. "Is Lady Gascoyne safe? Then, thank heaven, I've saved you!"

Paul knelt by his side, and held the flask to his lips. "Oh, Mr. Solomons, he cried, bending over him eagerly, "do try to swallow some."

But the blue lips never moved. Only, with a convulsive effort, Mr. Solomons drew something out of his breast pocket—a paper, it seemed, much worn and faded—and, clutching it tight in his grasp, seemed to thrust it towards him with urgent anxiety.

Paul took no notice of the gesture, but held the brandy still to Mr. Solomons' livid mouth. The bluff passenger waved him aside.

"No good," he said, "no good, my dear sir. He can't even swallow it. He's unconscious now. The valve don't act. It's all up, I'm afraid. Stand aside there, all of you, and let him have fresh air. That's his last chance. Fan him with a paper." He put his finger on the pulse, and shook his head ominously. "No good at all," he murmured. "He's run too fast, and the effort's been too much for him." He examined the lips closely, and held his ear to catch the last sound of breath. "Quite dead!" he went on. "Death from syncope. He died doing his best to prevent an accident."

A strange, solemn feeling came over Paul Gascoyne. It was some minutes before he could even think of Nea, who sat at the window behind, anxiously awaiting tidings of this unexpected stoppage. Then he burst into tears, as the stoker and engine-driver slowly lifted the body into an unoccupied carriage, and called on the passengers to take their seats while they backed into Hipsley Station.

"What is it?" Nea asked, seeing Paul return with blanched cheeks and wet eyes to the door of her carriage.

Paul could hardly get out the words to reply.

"A tunnel's fallen in—the tunnel under the Knoll that I've often told you about; and Mr. Solomons, running to warn the train of danger,

has fallen down dead by the side with heart-disease."

"Dead, Paul?"

"Yes, dead, Nea!"

"Did he know we were here?" Nea asked.

"I think so," Paul answered. "I wrote and told him what train we'd arrive by, and he must have found out the accident and rushed to warn us before anybody else was aware it had tumbled."

"Oh, Paul, was he alive to see you?"

"Alive?" Paul answered. "Oh, yes, he spoke to me. He asked if you were safe, and said good-bye to me."

They backed into the station by slow degrees, and the passengers, turning out with eager wonder and inquiry, began a hubbub of voices as to the tunnel and the accident and the man who had warned them, and the catastrophe, and the heart-disease, and the chance there was of getting on to-night, and how on earth they could ever get their luggage carted across to Hillborough Station. But Paul and Nea stood with hushed voices beside the corpse of the man they had parted with so lightly a fortnight before at Lanhydran.

"Do you know, Paul," Nea whispered, as she gazed awe-struck at that livid face, now half pale in death, "I somehow felt when he said to me that afternoon, 'From my poor, old, worn-out heart I thank you,' I half felt as if I was never going to see him again. He said good-bye to us as one says good-bye to one's friends for ever. And I am glad, at least, to think that we made him happy."

"I'm glad to think so, too," Paul answered with tears in his eyes. "But, Nea, do you know, till this moment I never realized how fond I was of him. I feel now as if an element had been taken out of my life for ever."

"Then I think he died happy," Nea replied.

Slowly and gradually the people at the station got things into order under these altered conditions. Cabs and carriages were brought from Hillborough to carry the through passengers and their luggage across the gap in the line caused by the broken tunnel. Telegrams were sent in every direction to warn coming trains and to organize a temporary local service. All was bustle and noise and turmoil and confusion. But in the midst of the hurly-burly, a few passengers still crowded, whispering, round the silent corpse of the man who had met his own death in warning them of their danger. Little by little the story got about how this was a Mr. Solomons, an estate agent at Hillborough, and how these two young people standing so close to his side, and watching over his body, were Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne, for whose sake he had run all the way to stop the train, and had fallen down dead at the last moment of heart-disease. In his hand he still clutched that worn and folded paper he had tried to force upon Paul, and his face yet wore in death that eager expression of a desire to bring out words that his tremulous

lips refused to utter. They stood there long painfully watching his features. At last a stretcher was brought from the town, and Mr. Solomons' body, covered with a black cloth, was carried upon it to his house in the High Street. Paul insisted on bearing a hand in it himself; and Nea, walking slowly and solemnly by his side, thus made her first entry as Lady Gascoyne into her husband's birthplace.

CHAPTER LII.

ESTATE OF THE LATE J. P. SOLOMONS.

FOR the next week all Hillborough was agog with the fallen tunnel. So great an event had never yet diversified the history of the parish. The little town woke up and found itself famous. The even tenor of local life was disturbed by a strange incursion of noisy navvies. Central Southernmen went down like lead to 90, as Mr. Solomons had shrewdly anticipated. The manager and the chief engineer of the line paid many visits to the spot to inspect the scene of the averted catastrophe. Hundreds of hands were engaged at once with feverish haste to begin excavations, and to clear the line of the accumulated *débris*. But six months at least must elapse, so everybody said, before traffic was restored to the *status quo*, and the Central Southern was once more in working order. A parallel calamity was unknown in the company's history: it was only by the greatest good-luck in the world, the directors remarked ruefully at their next meeting, that they had escaped the onus and odium of what the newspapers called a good first-class, murderous, selling railway accident.

On one point, indeed, all the London press was agreed on the Friday morning, that the highest praise was due to the heroic conduct of Mr. Solomons, a Jewish gentleman resident at Hillborough, who was the first to perceive the subsidence of the ground on the Knoll, and who, rightly conjecturing the nature of the disaster, hurried—unhappily, at the cost of his own life—to warn the station-masters at either end of the danger that blocked the way in the buried tunnel. As he reached his goal he breathed his last, pouring forth his message of mercy to the startled engine-driver. This beautiful touch, said the leader-writers, with conventional pathos, made a fitting termination to a noble act of self-sacrifice; and the fact that Mr. Solomons had friends in the train—Sir Paul and Lady Gascoyne, who were just returning from their wedding tour on the Continent—rather added to than detracted from the dramatic completeness of this moving *dénouement*. It was a pleasure to be able to record that the self-sacrificing messenger, before he closed his eyes finally, had clasped in his dying fingers the hands of the friends he had rescued, and was aware that his devotion had met with its due reward. While actions like these continue to be done in every-

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day life, the leader-writers felt we need never be afraid that the old English courage and the old English ideal of steadfast duty are beginning to fail us. The painful episode of the Knoll tunnel had at least this consolatory point, that it showed once more to the journalistic intelligence the readiness of Englishmen of all creeds or parties to lay down their lives willingly at the call of a great public emergency.

So poor Mr. Solomons, thus threnodied by the appointed latter-day bards of his adoptive nation, was buried at Hillborough as the hero of the day, with something approaching public honours. Paul, to be sure, as the nearest friend of the dead, took the place of chief mourner beside the open grave; but the neighbouring squires and other great county magnates, who under any other circumstances would have paid little heed to the Jewish money-lender's funeral, were present in person, or vicariously through their coachmen, to pay due respect to a signal act of civic virtue. Everybody was full of praise for Mr. Solomons' earnest endeavour to stop the train; and many who had never spoken well of him before, falling in now, after the feeble fashion of our kind and of the domestic sheep, with the current of public opinion, found hitherto undiscovered and unsuspected good qualities in all the old man's dealings with his fellow-creatures generally.

The day after the funeral, Paul, as Mr. Solomons' last bailee, attended duly, as in duty bound, with the will confided to his care in hand, at the attorney's office of Barr and Wilkie, close by in the High Street.

Mr. Wilkie received him with unwonted courtesy; but to that, indeed, Paul was now beginning to grow quite accustomed. He found everywhere that Sir Paul Gascoyne made his way in the world in a fashion to which plain Paul had been wholly unused in his earlier larval stages. Still, Mr. Wilkie's manner was more than usually deferential, even in these newer days of acknowledged baronetcy. He bowed his fat little neck, and smiled with all his broad and stumpy little face—why are country attorneys invariably fat, broad, and stumpy, I wonder?—so that Paul began to speculate within himself what on earth could be the matter with the amiable lawyer. But he began conversation with what seemed a very irrelevant remark.

"This smash in the tunnel 'll have depreciated the value of your property somewhat, Sir Paul," he said, smiling and rubbing his hands, as soon as the first interchange of customary civilities was over. "Central Southern A's are down at 89.90."

Paul stared at him in astonishment.

"I'm not a holder of stock, Mr. Wilkie," he answered after a pause of mental wonder.

The attorney gazed back with a comically puzzled look.

"But Mr. Solomons was," he answered.

Then after a short pause, "What! you don't know the contents of our poor friend Solomons' will, then?" he inquired, beaming.

"Why, that's just what I've come about," Paul replied, producing it. "A day or two after his nephew Lionel was buried at Lizard Town Mr. Solomons gave me this to take care of, and asked me to see it was duly proved after his death, and so forth. If you look at it, you'll see he leaves all his property to the Jewish Board of Guardians in London."

Mr. Wilkie took the paper from his hand with a smile, and glanced over it languidly.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered with a benignant nod—the country attorney is always benignant—"but you evidently don't understand our poor friend's ways as well as I do. It was a fad of his, to tell you the truth, that he always carried his will about with him, duly signed and attested, in his own breast-pocket, 'in case of accident,' as he used to put it."

"Oh, yes," Paul answered; "I know all that. He carried the predecessor of this about in his pocket just so, and he showed it to me in the train when we were going down to Cornwall, and afterwards, when poor Lionel was dead, he handed the present will over to me to take particular care of, because, he said, he thought he could trust me."

"Ah, yes," the man of law answered dryly, looking up with a sharp smile. "That's all very well as far as it goes. But, as a matter of habit, I know our friend Solomons would never have dreamed of handing over one will to you till he'd executed another to carry in his own breast-pocket. It would have made him fidgety to miss the accustomed feel of it. He couldn't have gone about ten minutes in comfort without one. And, indeed, in point of fact, he didn't. Do you know this paper, Sir Paul?" and the lawyer held up a stained and folded document that had seen much wear.

"Do you know this paper?"

"Why, yes," Paul answered, with a start of recognition. "I've seen it before somewhere. Ah, now I remember! It's the paper Mr. Solomons was clutching in his folded fingers when I saw him last, half alive and half dead, at Hipsley Station."

"Quite so," the lawyer answered. "That's exactly what it is. You're perfectly right. The men who brought him back handed it over to me as his legal adviser; and though I didn't draw it up myself—poor Solomons was always absurdly secretive about these domestic matters, and had them done in town by a strange solicitor—I see it's in reality his last will and testament."

"Later than the one I propound?" Paul inquired, hardly suspecting as yet whither all this tended.

"Later by two days, sir," Mr. Wilkie rejoined, beaming. "It's executed, Sir Paul, on the very same day, I note, as the date you've endorsed the will he gave you upon. In point of fact, he must have had this new will drawn

up and signed in the morning, and must have deposited the dummy one it superseded with you in the afternoon. Very like his natural secretiveness, that! He wished to conceal from you the nature of his arrangements. For Lionel Solomons' death seems entirely to have changed his testamentary intentions, and to have diverted his estate, both real and personal—well, so to speak, to the next representative."

"You don't mean to say," Paul cried, astonished, "he's left it all to Madame Ceriolo—to Lionel's widow?"

"No, my dear sir," he answered in the honeyed voice in which a wise attorney invariably addresses a rich and prospective client; "he revokes all previous wills and codicils whatsoever, and leaves everything he dies possessed of absolutely and without reserve to—his dear friend, Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet."

"No; you don't mean that!" Paul cried, taken aback, and clutching at his chair for support, his very first feeling at this sudden access of wealth being one of surprise, delight, and pleasure that Mr. Solomons should have harboured so kindly a thought about him.

"Yes, he does," the lawyer answered, warily making the best of his chance in breaking the good tidings. "You can read for yourself if you like, 'who has been more than a son to me,' he says, 'in my forlorn old age, and in consideration of the uniform gentleness, kindness, sense of justice, and forbearance with which he has borne all the fads and fancies of an exacting and often whimsical old money-lender.'"

The tears rose fast into Paul's eyes as he read these words.

"I'm afraid," he said after a pause, with genuine self-reproach, "I've sometimes thought too hardly of him, Mr. Wilkie."

"Well," the lawyer answered briskly, "he screwed you down, Sir Paul, there's no doubt about that—he screwed you down infernally. It was his nature to screw; he couldn't help it. He had his virtues, good soul! as well as his faults—I freely admit them; but nobody can deny he was an infernally hard hand at a bargain sometimes."

"Still, I always thought, in a sneaking sort of way, half unknown to himself, he had my interests at heart," Paul answered penitently.

"Well, there's a note inclosed with the will—a private note," the lawyer went on, producing it. "I haven't opened it, of course—it's directed to you; but I dare say it'll clear up matters on that score somewhat."

Paul broke the envelope and read to himself in breathless silence:

"MY DEAR, DEAR BOY,

"When you open this, I shall be dead and gone. I want your kind thoughts. Don't think too hardly of me. Since Leo died, I've thought only of you. You are all I have left

on earth to work and toil for. But if I'd told you so openly, and wiped out your arrears, or even seemed to relax my old ways at all about money, you'd have found me out and protested, and refused to be adopted. I didn't want to spoil your fine sense of independence. To tell you the truth, for my own sake I couldn't. What's bred in the bone will out in the blood. While I live, I must grasp at money, not for myself, but for you: it's become a sort of habit and passion with me. But forgive me for all that. I hope I shall succeed in the end in making you happy. When you come into what I've saved, and are a rich man, as you ought to be, and admired and respected and a credit to your country, think kindly sometimes of the poor old man who loved you well and left his all to you. Good-bye, my son.—Yours ever affectionately, J. P. SOLOMONS.

"P.S.—If Lady Gascoyne is ever presented at Court, I hope she will kindly remember to wear my diamonds."

When Paul laid the letter down, his eyes were dimmer with tears than ever.

"I so often misjudged him," he said slowly, "I so often misjudged him."

"But there's a codicil to the will, too," Mr. Wilkie said cheerfully, after a moment's pause. "I forgot to tell you that. There's a codicil also. Curiously enough, it's dated the day after your marriage. He must have gone up to town on purpose to add it."

"I remember," Paul said, "when he left Lanhydan, he mentioned he had important business next day in London."

"And by it," the lawyer continued, "he leaves everything, in case of your death before his own, absolutely to Nea, Lady Gascoyne, for her own sole use and benefit."

"That was kind," Paul cried, much touched. "That was really thoughtful of him."

"Yes," the lawyer answered dryly (sentiment was not very much in his way); "and as regards probate, from what I can hear, the value of the estate must be sworn at something between fifty and sixty thousand."

When Paul went home and told Nea of this sudden freak of fortune, she answered quietly:

"I more than half suspected it. You know, dear Paul, he wrote to papa while I was stopping at Sheffield, and urged me most strongly to marry you, saying our future was fully assured; and so he did, too, to Faith and Charlie. But he particularly begged us to say nothing to you about the matter. He thought it would only prevent your marrying." Then she flung her arms passionately around her husband's neck. "And now, darling," she cried, bursting into glad tears, "now that those dreadful Claims are settled for ever, and you're free to do exactly as you like, you can give up that horrid journalism altogether, and devote yourself to the work you'd really like to do—to something worthy of you—to something truly great and noble for humanity!"

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three days after my return from the hospital I was confined to my bunk, where I remained until I arrived in London. During all this time I was much worse than when I went to the hospital. It may be interesting for you and the general public to know that during the entire voyage home I was as helpless as a child, and suffering intense agony continually, although we tried all sorts of things in our medicine chest. On arriving in England, more dead than alive, I was got home to Portsmouth. Once here, I was peremptorily ordered to apply St. Jacobs Oil. There seems to be but one opinion in Portsmouth about St. Jacobs Oil, and that is, 'Everybody uses it,' and everybody recommends it, everybody praises it, and everybody was sure, positive, that it would cure me, and at once ease that terrible pain that was killing me by inches. Well, 'Everybody' was right, for the very first application relieved the terrible pains from which I had been constantly suffering for weeks.

Now, this may seem to some people a sailor's yarn, next to seeing the sea serpent; in short, very much exaggerated. I would not believe that such instan-

taneous relief from intense pain could be brought about by anything made by man, if I had not experienced it myself.

The contents of one bottle almost cured me; I procured another bottle, however, which I used but twice, when the cure was completed, the swelling, stiffness, soreness, and pain all left me, and I now, after weeks of pain, feel myself again. The remaining contents of the second bottle of St. Jacobs Oil still stands on the mantel shelf in my bedroom. I do not require it now, but shall hereafter always take a few bottles of

the Oil to sea with me, not only for my own use, but for others suffering from rheumatism, to which all sailors are more or less subject."

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