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Helen Wyverne's Marriage

CHAPTER I

It was the first week in May and the London season was just commencing. The weather was bitterly cold and windy and about as unlike the so-called merry month as anything could very well be.

Lady Henry Wyverne sat in the boudoir of the furnished house in John Street that she had taken for six weeks, and mentally reviewed the immediate future—financial and otherwise. The room was a pretty one, with a bay window that allowed just a glimpse of Park Lane, backed by the grateful green of Hamilton Gardens beyond. The furniture was both decorative and good, but yawning gaps in the china cabinets and square marks on the walls, indicated both the original colour of the paper and the places where pictures had hung, telling their own significant tale.

Alicia Wyverne was a handsome, fair, and somewhat faded woman, nearing the dreaded cross roads of forty years. The daughter of a country squire, with the smallest

of incomes and the biggest wants, and the widow of the younger son of an Irish duke, Lady Henry Wyverne's life had not lain in the sunny spaces of an arcade of roses. On the contrary, the years had been passed either in the dullest of rural seclusion, or in a brief and feverish effort to compete for a little while with friends and relatives immeasurably better off and more securely placed than herself. This penance she had endured periodically for two reasons, the first being, that she would have had no particular objection to change her state had a suitable offer happened along, the other, that for her only child's—a daughter—sake, she desired not to be quite socially forgotten. And now the time had come when she looked to reaping some reward for countless heartburnings, some snubs and many struggles with unsympathetic tradespeople.

As things go in this curious world, Lady Henry Wyverne might have been reckoned a happy woman on this particular May morning. She had sufficient funds in hand for a campaign that would last well into the autumn. The old Duke had sent quite a handsome cheque for the equipping of his dead son's only child, while in that child, now eighteen, her mother possessed the unquestionable beauty of the year, or possibly of many years.

Her appearance at the Aylesbury hunt ball the previous February had created the greatest possible sensation. The mother thought of that now as she stared dreamily out into the street, where the dust was being whipped by the east wind into eddying gritty circles.

Yes; Helen was something quite out of the ordinary. She was like her father, and he had been the true Irish type, the type so seldom met with. Alicia Wyverne's thoughts went back and down the years while her sight grew a little dim. What a dear, daring, reckless fellow he had been, and how utterly her heart had been lost that night of the Guards' ball! After six weeks of fierce wooing they had married, married on what? practically on their wedding presents and the unreal dream of a possible to-morrow, a to-morrow that had never dawned, for just fourteen months later he was dead. Those months, short though they had been, had not been all bliss; they had tried to go the pace, but it had developed into a sadly jog-trot one.

Henry Wyverne had been what is known as a child where money is concerned, which is a truly irritating form of infantine simplicity to have to deal with.

Many pictures rose before her mind, standing out as clearly as milestones on a moonlit road, and as they did so Alicia Wyverne shivered a little even at this lapse of time.

How foolish it had all been, how foolish! Perhaps her girlish love for him had been the best and truest impulse of a somewhat colourless and selfish life, but like many other good impulses, the price of it had been so heavy as to be out of all proportion.

Well! Helen should be saved from a similar fate. There should be no friends or enemies to bewail, "Poor

Helen's miserable choice," "History repeating itself, my dear."

No, those small graceful feet should walk where her mother's never had. Helen should never know the wearing, carking, age-hastening care of lack of money. She should always remain ignorant of all the hateful shifts and contrivances imperative to that horrible pastime, known as "dodging one's creditors."

Just then the china clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour of 12.30, and her small Maltese dog awoke with a short bark from his noonday slumber. Alicia Wyverne banished reflections as one may a flight of sparrows, locked her bank-book away and remembered that her friend and kinswoman, Jane Cumberland, had promised to take luncheon with her at 1.15 to discuss the coming campaign and post her in many up-to-date details anent persons and things, especially persons. There was just time for a short turn in the Park and no more.

Lady Cumberland was punctual to the moment and she and her hostess sat down to a small but perfect luncheon in a delightful dining-room filled with the promising scent of daffodils and early violets and warmed by a wood fire that burnt on an open hearth.

"When do you expect Helen?" enquired the former as she selected a plover's egg from its green bed.

"To-morrow. I thought it wisest that she should not be seen before the Drawing Room."

"Quite right, my dear Alicia, quite right," Lady

Cumberland agreed. "It is a great mistake, I think, this modern idea of letting girls run about like rabbits in a wood before they have made their curtsy to the Sovereign," and the speaker sipped a glass of sherry meditatively.

Jane Cumberland with her powdered hair, prominent black eyes and rather fat face, bore a most striking resemblance to the portraits of Louis XVI., with which, however, her brusque manners were somewhat at variance.

Nevertheless, she was a great lady, on whose nod or frown much depended. One of the Amerys by birth, she had married in her first season Sir Hugh Clinton of Clinton de Laval, a very rich Yorkshire baronet. At his death, fifteen years later, she became Marchioness of Cumberland, and a power in the two worlds of London, that of society solely, and that more serious one, which is political. Lord Cumberland had been twice premier, Knight of the Garter and one of the most trusted advisers and personal friends of Queen Victoria.

Great, indeed, was the grief expressed when he was found dead in his chair in his favourite corner of the great library at Cumberland Abbey. That had happened five years before, since when, after a decent interval and all ceremonious observances, Lady Cumberland had returned to the world that she loved, and found consolation and forgetfulness in a constant round of pleasure, bridge parties and the love affairs of her friends and foes, particularly those of the latter.

"I trust that the dear girl will really have an enjoyable time. You can, of course, depend upon me," she remarked now, when the butler, having put the second course on the table and all the other things on the sideboard, withdrew. "Of course, things are nothing like what they used to be. That is hardly to be expected with all the queer creatures that are growing up or dropping down from no one knows where. Really, I think that my house is one of the very few where you may count upon being safe from the Hebrew invasion, at any rate."

"Naturally, my dear Jane, one cannot imagine it otherwise," exclaimed Alicia Wyverne. "We of the old families do owe something to ourselves."

"I am afraid we must look to ourselves to pay it then, my love. But, to talk of Helen, I hope she is tractable, you see it is nearly three years since I saw her."

"I hope so," her mother answered slowly.

"You must marry her at once," asserted Lady Cumberland with decisiveness, "and then you will feel that you have done your duty and you can take up charity or something like that as a diversion. It's quite wonderful the insight that one obtains into human nature when one dallies with the charities. Yes, you must certainly marry her."

"It is desirable," Lady Wyverne conceded, "because I doubt if we could afford a second season."

"I am quite convinced that if Helen has half of your commonsense all will go well."

"I suppose she thinks of love, all young girls do," said her mother.

"Nonsense!" snapped Lady Cumberland. "Really, this incessant talk about love seems to me to border on the indecent."

Her companion smiled, as she chose a peach with care. "Still, it is there," she ventured.

"Where?" asked Jane Cumberland. "Personally to me it seems largely the result of indigestion, a thing from which I am happy to say that I have always been free and as a consequence have led a vastly pleasant existence." Lady Cumberland helped herself to the coffee which now appeared and a chasse of kummel, "My dear," she continued, "you can believe me when I tell you that love is where it has always been and is likely to remain, in a girl's dreams and a man's senses."

Lady Henry Wyverne was silent, she was not going to embark on an argument.

"I quite agree with you," she assented after a pause.

"You are a sensible woman, Alicia," Lady Cumberland remarked, and then they adjourned to a more confidential conversation upstairs. When Lady Cumberland was seated in a thoroughly comfortable chair, with somewhat generous feet, encased in her favourite elastic side boots, on a footstool, she drew a small gold clasped pocket-book from the mysterious recesses of her dahlia coloured velvet gown. "My memory is not what it was," she explained, as she raised lorgnettes to her still bright eyes, "therefore,

I make notes. Now let me see. I have secured invitations for you for the big rout at Manchester House, also the fancy dress ball at Derbyshire House, which will be the event of the season."

Her hostess's tired expression visibly lightened. "The smaller events are, of course, foregone conclusion even if it was only for the dear Duke's sake."

"The Clinton de Laval will invite you for Ascot and I shall give a shoot myself at Ardfert in August, so that is arranged. Sandringham or Chatsworth are, I fear, out of the question," she paused, glancing rapidly through some other pages, as if searching for something else.

"The programme sounds all that it should be," Alicia Wyverne said.

Lady Cumberland laid the little book down, with her glasses beside it. "And now I think that the best marriage the dear child could make would be with my nephew-in-law, Glencare."

"But he is over forty, and besides, he will never marry."

"Never is a word that I have always detested," exclaimed Lady Cumberland, irritably. "As to his age, it is an ideal one for a man; they have usually by that time realised all the fallacy of the past and are only anxious to grasp some of the wisdom of the future. Now the wisdom of the future usually means matrimony." The speaker played with her pearl grey gloves while the light from the fire fell on the few beautiful old-world rings that she wore.

"As for the rest Glencare has, as you know, everything.

It is true that there have been many scandals, but then it is always the richest fruit that is pecked at. Anyway, a charming wife and a baby or two would soon put all that at rest. And now my love though I have not said half that I intended to, I really must be going." She glanced at her jewelled watch.

"Don't go yet," entreated Lady Henry, "your conversation is so helpful to one who has been so long absent from civilisation."

"Well, I always considered you made a great error in deserting the world," remarked Lady Cumberland.

"I am afraid one makes nothing but mistakes when one's circumstances are as narrow and difficult to navigate as the St. George's Channel." The words had a distinct trace of bitterness.

"I know, I know." Lady Cumberland nodded her head, though not knowing in the very least. "It—money—is a terrible problem, invented, I feel convinced, by the Devil in order to help the Jews and compass the ruin of the Christians."

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," Alicia Wyverne answered, "and in our class of life it is more than a problem, it becomes a tragedy."

"I have always considered," her friend said slowly, "that a 'Society for Helping Needy Members of the Aristocracy' would have been most useful and I am sure would have proved most popular with the middle classes."

"It will possibly come in time," said Alicia Wyverne,

who was slow to even perceive the ironical. "Of course, poverty is not really a sin," she exclaimed with doubtful sententiousness.

"No, dear, it is only a thousand times worse," Lady Cumberland replied as she rose. "Good-bye, dear Alicia," she exclaimed, nibbling the cheek of her hostess, "bring the dear child to see me to-morrow evening," and then she rustled away down the stairs and out to where her carriage had been waiting for some time.

"Alicia is not interesting," she thought as she drove down Curzon Street, "continual widowhood is like continual cold—strangely depressing in its effects."

* * * * *

At nine o'clock on the following night, Helen Wyverne stood before the full length mirror in her bedroom and looked at her own shimmering figure reflected therein, critically appraising the effect, from the fine sweep of coal-black hair that swept in natural waves back from her brow, the violet eyes, curiously long in shape, the beautiful mouth, the fine poise of the head on its throat and the grave, sweet expression of face that from almost babyhood had been hers.

"Will I do, mother mine?" she asked turning round as Lady Henry, resplendent in grey satin and diamonds, entered.

Would she do? The hearer's heart beat high. Would the personification of radiant youth which, lovely now, promised an even far finer maturity; the slim, swaying

girlish form, so charming to the eye, would in the years to come have gained in grace without losing one iota of its elegance.

Would she do? Lady Alicia advanced and kissed her with an impulse of proud affection for which a moment later she felt ashamed.

"You look far too nice, Helen," she said, in her even tones, "for mothers to forgive me easily."

Helen threw her head back and smiled. "Nonsense!" she exclaimed, "you want to make me vain, you dear, silly, fond person!" She took up her train and fan and gloves and without a backward glance linked her arm in the elder woman's. "How do you think the girls will forgive me when they see you?" she murmured, glancing with fond approval at the stately figure beside her in its sweeping draperies of dove grey that held lovely lights and shadows when its wearer moved.

Just then a maid entered carrying a bouquet consisting of three circles of violets—deepest purple, then Parma, then white in a gilded holder—their faint, sweet perfume sweeping through the room like the dewy odours of some country lane.

"They are from Dallas I feel sure," the girl exclaimed, taking the flowers from the salver and burying her face in the yielding velvet petals, "he said that he would send me some."

Lady Henry frowned. "They are very charming, Helen," she remarked, "but you cannot possibly wear them."

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"Why not?" the girl enquired, her fingers clasping the bouquet closer.

"Because, my dear, violets are for matrons, not for débutantes; and there are white roses for you downstairs."

"Nonsense, mother, I am not going to be bound by such an absurd notion," cried her daughter. "These match my eyes and tell me that Dallas is sorry that I make my entry into the world to-night."

Again Lady Henry frowned. "As you will, my child," she answered with certain vexation. "Come, we shall be late," and she led the way down the softly lighted staircase, followed closely by a dazzling vision in glimmering white and silver, the violets held close up against her mouth.

It was a fine spring night, having changed from the cold of the day before with that startling rapidity so characteristic of the English climate.

Their brougham, a very good one, jobbed for the season, bore them in the space of a few seconds to Lady Cumberland's gloomy residence in Berkeley Square.

Two minutes later they were in the big drawing-room, where things had never been altered since the very early part of the Victorian era. Here, by the fire, with a large needlework screen placed between her and its blaze, sat the mistress of the house in black satin and point lace. On the opposite side of the immense hearth and well in the gloom of the maroon coloured velvet curtains sat a very good-looking man of something more than forty.

"My dear aunt, you really are too transparent," he was saying when the double doors opened and the butler—whom Jane Cumberland always declared must be a hundred and fifty years old, because his daughter, her maid, was a hundred and forty-nine—announced Lady Henry Wyverne and Miss Wyverne.

The man by the fireplace rose and bowed, but did not look pleased, while Lady Cumberland, after expressing her pleasure at what she artfully described as a delightfully impromptu visit, introduced "my nephew, Lord Glencare," and then, inviting Helen to sit by her side, beamed on her through her gold lorgnettes. Lord Glencare turning his attention with cold courtesy to Lady Henry Wyverne.

"You look lovely, my child," Lady Cumberland exclaimed, "you remind me of my own girlhood centuries ago. I won't mention dates, because friends say I look so much younger than I am, and illusions about people are so much pleasanter than delusions. But, my dear," she continued, bringing her minute examination of the girl's toilette to a conclusion, "you must not carry a nosegay of violets. Do you not know that they are *les fleurs de malheur*."

"I know," Helen Wyverne answered gently and over her habitual splendid pallor a faint colour ran, "but a cousin and very dear friend sent them and I promised to wear them."

"Ah! that is different, always keep your promises, my love," responded the old lady. Then she chatted pleasantly on other topics till the clock struck the half-hour. "I am

afraid, my dear Alicia," she remarked, leaning forward in her chair, "it grows late. I thank you for bringing Helen to see me, it is delightful to see sunshine at eventide."

Lady Henry Wyverne rose. The girl bent and kissed Lady Cumberland's hand with a pretty old-fashioned air and five minutes later mother and daughter were on their way to Buckingham Palace, whose shifting, twinkling lights showed like another city above the syren and night-like stillness of the Green Park, while aunt and nephew resumed their conversation in Berkeley Square.

"A most exquisite creature," ejaculated the former when Lord Glencare re-entered the drawing-room, "since Lady Cynthia Abercrombie's début I remember no one to compare with her."

"She is very handsome," he admitted.

"You do not appear enthusiastic," Lady Cumberland remarked.

"I never am, dear aunt. I always envy you that delightful and rejuvenating faculty, it is one of the many charms that makes you the most delightful company in London." He told her.

"You may smoke," said his aunt. "I don't permit it, as you know, but you are privileged."

There lurked a little smile in his eyes as he selected a cigarette and lit it. Then he sat down once more and looked quizzically across at her.

"And now, my dear and august relative, what is it that I think I see trembling on your eloquent lips," he cried gaily.

The old lady shook her head causing the great emeralds in her ears to emit sparkling green lights. "No," she answered, "no, I'm not going to be led into that last infirmity of age, repetition, you know well what I would say."

"I do," he responded and he sighed, "but it is impossible. I dislike women. It is a horrible confession, I know, but it has the doubtful merit of being a true one," he paused, puffing his cigarette and dispensing the delicate curls of smoke as he did so.

"Helen Wyverne would do so excellently," Lady Cumberland murmured meditatively.

Lord Glencare laughed. "My dear aunt, your naiveté is most refreshing. I knew you thought that. And so you invited me this evening for a quiet talk about your investments—your diplomacy and discretion are alike admirable," he regarded her with a glance of fond amusement.

"You are hopeless and want to live always for pleasure," Lady Cumberland said reproachfully.

"I'm so sorry to disappoint you. I know it is most reprehensible," was his answer. "Your programme is most seductive or would be to any other than my graceless self. And now, most gracious of people, I am not going to permit you to lose your beauty sleep. What can I do for you? Shall I see those stockbrokers?"

"I wish you would, dear boy, and report to me." .

"With pleasure. I will go citywards the first thing in the morning. I think of going to Paris for two or three weeks."

"Paris? What can you see in that wicked city?"

"Wickedness. Just that and nothing more."

"You are growing too old for that."

"Pray don't say so, aunt," he cried in mock alarm, "don't tell me that virtue is another penalty to be added to that of years."

"I shan't tell you anything at all," Lady Cumberland answered him, "you deserve nothing at my hands."

"That is why you ought to bestow everything, it is only the undeserving who need anything," he exclaimed, and he threw his cigarette into the heart of the fading fire.

"Then you must be in very needy circumstances," the old lady remarked drily.

"Perhaps, who knows!"

He rose to his feet and looked at the clock.

"I must bid you good-night, you dear, fascinating censor. I will call to-morrow at six, if you will promise to be *really* alone."

His aunt laughed and stretched out a plump white hand. "I promise," she replied.

And then he took his leave.

Ulric Arden Buckley, Lord Glencare, was one of those exceptionally fortunate men who to great natural talents added enormous possessions and unquestionable rank. He had entered into his kingdom after a minority of eighteen years and since that hour had lived for himself, pleasure his companion, pleasure his object and pursuit. It is true that for one year he had worshipped Art and produced

some very charming pictures, scenes principally in Devonshire, delightful cottage gardens filled with gay, laughing flowers and one or two grey, misty, suggestive seascapes that won him much praise and success. Then he had written a book of poems, in which lay some very pretty thoughts, expressed with much elegance and no little originality; after which he had for no apparent reason, save caprice, thrown aside both brush and pen and gone back into the old whirlpool, had banished simplicity and lived in an exotic and sensuous atmosphere, one in which nothing healthy survived for long.

Sometimes a sense of the vicious uselessness of his existence came to him, but he thrust it aside.

Right, wrong, virtue, vice, what were they? What did they really mean? Sonorous words to control and frighten commonplace people, who existed not to lead but to be led. His cynicism despised all such. You enjoyed or you did not enjoy. There his philosophy rounded itself and ended. That was all that there ever seemed to be said on any subject. For the rest, he was king and founder of a set, famous for the queerest of freaks, the strangers of tastes and pursuits, men who were a complete new and original law unto themselves. Clever, daring, original, rich in talent, and in opportunity, a set regarded with honour by many and with a certain dazed, reluctant admiration by others. Its ranks numbered so many who were famous in the countless and varied walks of life, that criticism let alone, censure perforce died away.

Such was the society amongst which Lord Glencare passed his time. In person, he was tall and dark, possessing distinction of bearing and manner, which is as fascinating as it is unusual. Women admired him immensely, which did not please him in the least; all dogs loved him, which did please him very much. He believed firmly that neither people nor things were worth caring for; or if ever gained and afterwards lost lamenting for. And on these lines he lived his life.

CHAPTER II

THERE was no murmur of dissent as to Helen Wyverne's claims to be considered a radiant beauty. At the Drawing Room, even the politely impassive countenance of Royalty had relaxed, while in society, park, opera, balls, the result was the same. From the workman in the street to Viscount Lackington in the Blues, the result of Helen Wyverne's appearance was identical, though differently expressed. Invitations poured in at John Street ; the hall table was piled high with the cards of people who in other days would honestly have hardly known who Lady Alicia Wyverne was or had been, without a refreshing glance into the pages of Burke or Debrett.

But so potent a draw was the presence of Miss Wyverne at dance or garden-party that bold indeed would have been the hostess who could have afforded to ignore the fact or her.

As for Helen, she was enjoying herself as only perfect health and a sum total of eighteen years possibly can, and

was quite indifferent to the disagreeable knowledge—a knowledge that had already brought a few more pronounced silver lines on her mother's head—that though June was already at hand, no single proposal had as yet been laid at her daughter's feet. The reason was far to seek and if sought would assuredly not have been found by Lady Henry. It was one of those entirely inexplicable facts that no puzzling will make clear, and yet, perhaps, it was not so very inexplicable after all. Anyway, its solution lay far beyond Alicia Wyverne's scope. She had not been cursed, or is it blessed, with a constructive brain, or even an observant eye. Feeling perplexed and worried, she merely indulged herself a little more than usual in headaches, chills, and her favourite neuralgia, and deputed the chaperoning of Helen to various friends or relatives, congratulating and consoling herself the while that by so doing she was saving herself the price of a new gown or cloak.

It was Jane Cumberland, who, calling at John Street, took it upon herself to enlighten her kinswoman. "My dear Alicia," she observed, "you are neglecting your duty towards Helen, and incidently yourself, in a manner that is almost criminal."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Alicia in much surprise, adding, "Why, I live for duty and it is rapidly undermining my health."

"At the risk of appearing unfeeling, I can only remark that, at this juncture, health is of less importance than the

gossip that is going round, started, I firmly believe, by that odious Jane Barton, to the effect that Helen is secretly engaged to Dallas Dunbar."

Lady Cumberland paused, while Alicia Wyverne first grew hot and then cold with annoyance.

"Dallas!" she exclaimed, "Dallas of all people."

"Of all people, as you justly say, good-looking, dissipated, penniless, with a sheaf of love affairs more or less disreputable in his brief past."

"Helen and he, being cousins, have always been friends, but nothing more than I—"

"That you know of," interrupted her visitor. "There really ought to be a special lens invented for aiding the vision of mothers."

Lady Henry did not reply, she remembered the night of the Drawing-Room.

"Anyway," continued Jane Cumberland, "a rumour like this is the ruin of a girl in her first season. Of course all the men become frightened. The situation becomes a sort of social Tom Tiddler's ground, entirely impossible from every point of view."

"What you say accounts for a good deal," Lady Alicia said slowly, "I shall speak seriously to Helen and forbid Dallas coming to the house."

"If he is anything like his dear, delightful old grandfather, he will do as he pleases, not as you tell him." Lady Cumberland smiled with a retrospective smile. "How well I remember him in the early fifties when we used to

dance at Almack's and drink milk in the park at dawn. That was before he ran away with pretty, stupid little Eva Featherleigh, and broke her heart, or was it the bank at Baden-Baden, at this length of time, I really forget which. Anyway, it is quite immaterial." Lady Cumberland took up a photograph of Helen and fell to examining it.

Alicia Wyverne's thoughts were elsewhere. "So like her father, so like, not the least trace of the Amerys. It is just as well, murmured Lady Cumberland, Henry was so good-looking."

"I am afraid the season is going to be a horribly disappointing one," her hostess exclaimed sadly.

"Most certainly it will be," was the prompt rejoinder, "unless this annoying rumour is accorded a prompt burial and that, my love, I may say, lies almost entirely with you."

After which expression of opinion, Lady Cumberland took her departure for her daily drive in the park, while Alicia Wyverne drew up and marshalled mentally her material forces. Ascot would very soon arrive and if a girl was not engaged at, or immediately after that function—well, it was too dreadful to think about. Bills from tradespeople, whose ardour always waxed warmer, as that of admirers and friends grew cooler, Alicia Wyverne had been through that delectable anti-climax in her own season. The distant echoes of Lady Amery's laments and reproaches in her own first season came back clearly to her now. She understood it all at this moment, but then, ah! then, she had understood nothing. Her maternal parents' anger had

moved her no more from her love course than that lady's recourse to bed and *sal volatile* had done. Her father Sir Crawley's language, terse, comprehensive and to the point, modelled on the early days of the Regent also had failed. She, as a girl of nineteen, had shown a strength of purpose, somewhat at variance with her present day attitude. Would Helen be more tractable, more malleable, when the day and the hour came, as it inevitably must? Or would history repeat itself in that ugly uncomfortable fashion that it had? Was there anything so unoriginal and monotonous as history? Surely nothing. Thinking which Lady Henry Wyverne rang for tea.

CHAPTER III

IN a luxurious little flat in Park Lane, supported no one would have been bold enough to say exactly how, sat Dallas Dunbar, fair, young, charming, and wearing his usual ingenuous expression so justly dreaded by dowagers and by his creditors. With him was a man of good appearance and address, one of those countless frequenters of Piccadilly and St. James and the less well known clubs.

Eric Cave-Browne had been the son of an English admiral and had been reared in quite decent surroundings. It is true that the old sailor, in a fit of temper at his cook giving him notice, had taken the desperate course of marrying her, of which a boy, now this man of fifty, had been the doubtful result, and about whose appearance his father had been constantly heard to grieve over the indisputable fact that the child bore so much resemblance to the gardener who worked about the place.

However, let that be as it might, Eric Cave-Browne received a good education and a few thousand pounds when the Admiral died—his wife having preceded him—

which he promptly spent, principally gambling. Possessed of undoubted brains and no ambition of any creditable kind, he drifted to that mysterious sea of great cities which bears on its bosom such varied and curious specimens of flotsam and jetsam ; a sea whose waves are human frailty, crime, sin, remorse, despair, and which leads on its way in time to the relentless all-engulfing ocean that has been named oblivion.

Three years before Dallas Dunbar, then five-and twenty and a gentleman, met Eric Cave-Browne at the Hermitage in Monte Carlo. People who have nothing to do usually go everywhere at the right season. This is a remarkable psychological fact but hardly more remarkable than it is true. Cave-Browne was a fine pigeon shot—poor, pretty pigeons to fall to so ignoble a mark—a good rider, excellent walker and swimmer. Those sort of men have to be these things to get any kind of toleration. Dallas Dunbar didn't know that. The Dunbars of this world never do. Though such knowledge might help them, it is well and good and as it should be that their minds remain clean to the end. There are some natures that may and do touch pitch and are never a whit the blacker, at least not for a very long time.

These two, so dissimilar, came together in that Monte Carlo world, and under circumstances which it would be unnecessary and possibly unfair to enter into. Cave-Browne proved of much and valuable assistance to the younger man—a case of the eagle and the dove, the result a foregone conclusion.

But to return to Park Lane on this particular June evening.

"There is no use in being so squeamish," the elder man was saying, "lots of thoroughly decent fellows do it. To my mind there is far too much latitude accorded to certain pursuits and infinitely too little to others." He sipped his hock and seltzer, watching his host narrowly.

Dunbar shifted uneasily, and sighed impatiently. "I daresay you are right, Browne," he admitted, "but there are some things a gentleman—" he paused.

"Gentleman be damned!" cried his companion with impatience. "The only men who are reckoned gentlemen now-a-days are the ones who can go on paying their way."

"True," muttered Dunbar.

"Can you do so?" his friend asked.

"Not after Monday," the young man answered, flushing scarlet.

"Well," the other retorted slowly, "what is the most sensible thing to do? Which way will you be deemed the finest gentleman?" The speaker's lips turned back over his teeth with the scorn of one who years ago has passed to the air those scruples that other men call honour. "Which?" he continued. "Settling like a man, or posted as a defaulter?"

The listener moved restlessly, but did not reply immediately. Cave-Browne went on in his convincing way.

"I know, if you don't. It means going under, Dallas, giving up the only world worth the living in, the only people

worth the knowing, quitting the country for some ghastly hole like Texas or Mexico, where civilisation is in its infancy, where they kill a man first and enquire into the justice of it afterwards."

"Still," exclaimed Dunbar, "if one does makes a hopeless mess of things here, it is a new life."

"A new life," assented his friend, with a short laugh. "Those places mean a new hell. You must remember I had a taste of it once, so I possess the doubtful advantage of knowing what I am talking about," saying which he rose and stood against the mantelpiece, staring down at his most admirably polished boots.

"God knows, I don't want to put the sea between me and England," Dallas Dunbar said, mixing himself an iced drink.

"Of course you don't," cried the other, his expression brightening. "No one with an ounce of brains ever would. You can have the best of everything here, but to go into exile, to work with your hands under the most primitive conditions, pshaw! the thing is not to be thought of!" He opened his cigarette case and selected one with care.

"There is no doubt I am in a devil of a hole," the other said, after a short pause.

"What matter?" Cave-Browne rejoined, extinguishing his match. "Now, Dal," he added, "don't be a fool! Self-preservation is the first and most important law that humanity knows. Besides, in your case it is a duty as

well, pretty imperative at that. If a social extinguisher becomes your portion, what about your mother? How will she suffer?"

Dallas Dunbar winced. How well the other man knew where and how best to wound. Cave-Browne followed up his temporary advantage.

"Besides, where is the harm? Absolutely non-existent, except in the puritanical minds of sundry dear old ladies and gentlemen who have never known the tediousness of being hard up in their lives."

"What is it you want me to do?" Dunbar asked hastily, ignoring his last words.

"You need do nothing beyond getting him here. What does he play? Not bridge, I hope?"

"No, poker."

"Good!" exclaimed Cave-Browne. "I'll do the work, and you shall have half."

The younger man shuddered; he felt like a murderer.

"I only want enough to settle on Monday," he ventured in a curious, muffled voice

The listener gave one of his short, hard laughs.

"Pickles!" he cried. "We may as well pluck most of his feathers while we are about it. After all, he'll only have to cheat a few more clients on the Stock Exchange to make up for it."

Dallas Dunbar was silent.

"Wait till you are my age," Cave-Browne pursued, "things that appear to you gigantic now will have assumed

their proper proportions. All this talk about right and wrong, virtue and vice, pshaw ! you will laugh at it."

"I think not," was the reply.

"Oh, yes, you will ! Philosophy will have come to your rescue. Mind you, Dallas, most of us who are worth anything start out with ideals and other tiresome things like that. Some of us carry them longer than others, but eventually life comes on in the minor key, and existence is a damn sight more agreeable."

"I sincerely hope so."

"My dear fellow, youth is a tragedy, or rather, we make it so. So much time is wasted in getting rid of certain superstitions and ideas that parents—who as a rule are a very curious race—think it their duty to rear us in." The speaker paused.

"I adore my parents," the other said doggedly.

"Of course you do," retorted his friend. "That's exactly how they ought to be regarded in this sorry scheme of things, but as advisers they are worse than useless, the average parent's one fixed notion being that the world is much less beautiful, and everybody much more wicked than when they were young."

"Perhaps they are right," said Dallas Dunbar, gloomily.

"Perhaps they are nothing of the kind. No, they are simply dear, delightful, irresponsible old creatures who lose their commonsense in the mists of age, and substitute for it prejudices," Cave-Browne concluded.

His friend rose to his feet. "Let us quit the subject,"

he exclaimed irritably; "we are not likely to agree. As I say, I adore my parents, and when they die it will be a sorrow from which I shall never recover."

"There are only two real sorrows in the world," the elder man answered, "one is no money, and the other a sluggish liver. Now, to turn to other matters. Can you arrange things for to-morrow night?"

"I think so," Dunbar replied, miserably.

"Right," rejoined Cave-Browne, taking up his hat and stick. "Telephone me particulars, and now, good-bye for the present." He held out his long, slim hand, but the other ignored it.

Cave-Browne smiled to himself as he went down the stairs and out into Park Lane. "Curious strain of logic seems so often to animate the brains of the good people," he reflected, as he hailed a cab.

The season rolled on its accustomed course—dinners, dances, races, charity bazaars, concerts—the yearly round of the eternally commonplace.

Dallas Dunbar went the pace more than he had ever done before. He had thrown his conscience overboard. Some people were known to wonder how it was all accomplished on the modest portion allotted to the son of an English baronet, but the surprise ceased when his extraordinary luck at cards was taken into account.

In the intervals permitted by abnormally late hours, Dallas Dunbar contrived to be with Helen Wyverne, and between those two a complete understanding seemed to exist.

Lady Alicia Wyverne was not happy. Lady Cumberland was surprised and disappointed that the looks that she deemed peerless should have so far failed.

It was nearing the end of June when a scandal, the rumours anent which had long been the exclusive property of the clubs, and a few individuals in the know, positively rent the social atmosphere of the entire of England, coming as a shattering and unbelievable thunderbolt to the majority. Names were mentioned that ranked amongst some of the highest in the country.

The central figure was a poet and genius of exotic and brilliant attainments, whose name had long been familiar to the world; a man of exceptional powers, of kindly heart, a radiant and splendid gentleman, whose works were destined to echo down the centuries. But for all that, it was said, he was dominated by a strange and fearful madness.

His following was a large and curious one, composed of satellites, none of whom were great, many of whom were weak, several of whom were merely vile.

For years past ugly tales had circulated but had been ignored, the man's wit and brain had been of such a rare order that onlookers were mostly blinded and of the few who were not, none cared, or perhaps dared to speak.

So time had passed. The man had gone from one intellectual eminence to another. The town rang with his bon mots, flocked to his plays and quoted his poems, schemed for his presence at their entertainments. Women

marvelled at his strange haunting personality, men dreaded the keenness of his mental vision, the lightning quickness of his tongue.

The man was at the supreme height of fame and ambition. His foot had attained to the topmost rung of the long steep ladder called ambition, when, without any real or apparent reason to the casual crowd, that dizzy eminence began to rock and shiver under him ; it gave fair but secret warning that not for long could its strength support the strain.

The man only smiled, and in the blindness of his magnificent scornful egotism, his wonderful belief in his own destiny, started to try conclusions against the world. So the blow fell with headlong startling suddenness.

London drew a long, shuddering, horrified breath and then eagerly bought the evening papers. Many rejoiced ; cowards who had received countless benefits from his royal hands deserted him as rats a sinking ship ; a mother once beautiful and famous wept the slow tears of age in the sorrowful solitude of a shabby house in Chelsea.

Many fled the country. A great minister was ordered suddenly abroad, likewise others of high repute. Only the man himself stood firm. Society was outraged and demanded savagely his sacrifice and asked it not in vain.

The world seemed suddenly to have caught on fire. The papers howled, the mob yelled, thousands of persons willingly helped to build the bonfire.

England was up in arms and her fury was by no means allayed by the jesting condescension assumed by the French papers ; Germany contented itself with caricatures ; Italy merely remarked that the result with its attendant outcry was " Very British."

All of which was something deeper and wider than merely bad for the unfortunate sacrifice.

In the height of it all Jane Cumberland sent for her nephew. He obeyed the summons with all the rapidity that was consistent with an absence from London. Lady Cumberland was sojourning for a week at her villa at Isleworth, a house that had been a marriage gift from the late Lord Cumberland in the dear, dead, delightful days when the Thames really was in possession of that silvery solitude of which one reads and hears so much and sees so lamentably little ; a house, rural but solid, set behind great walls in the midst of a truly magnificent garden that combined privacy and poetry.

Lord Glencare arrived in time for dinner, which was served in the summer dining-room, an apartment less sombre than the others, having been built by a former tenant, who once, in the person of Mrs. Robinson, the Perdita of the Regent's Florizel, had lived and loved her brief reign there.

Glencare had been salmon-fishing in Ireland and entertained his relative with tales of former friends throughout the progress of the meal. When it was finished, Lady Cumberland left him, saying as she did so that when his

coffee and cigar were both finished, she would like to speak to him in her own room. In reply to which he answered that he would be glad to come to her immediately, as he must return to town that night, seeing that he was leaving to join a friend's yacht for a cruise in Turkish waters in the morning, hearing which his aunt expressed not the slightest surprise.

Ten minutes later he entered her boudoir, a room furnished in charming chintz with Saxe shepherds and shepherdesses and a ceiling painted in admirable imitation of Botticelli, with groups of angel children. There were several heavy incongruous pieces of solid furniture introduced amongst these gay people, with a royal disregard for appropriateness, but an old and wheezy spinnet and groups of cabbage roses in china bowls went far towards covering up such an incongruity, while wide windows opening on to a Dutch garden, that shone in the summer starlight, completed a very pleasing eye picture of a dreamy, pleasant, poetic place.

Lady Cumberland in lavender silk and Maltese lace was seated in a very enormous high-backed chair, which history had it once belonged to the delightfully virgin queen, knitting silk bridge purses, when Lord Glencare opened the door.

Declining an invitation to be seated, Lord Glencare took up his stand with his back to the fireplace.

Lady Cumberland laid aside her silks in a lacquered and gilded basket at her side.

"You look very serious," he remarked.

"I feel so," was the reply.

"Pray unburden yourself, my dear aunt."

"I am greatly disturbed about you."

"About me." His eyes expressed the surprise he felt.

"Yes, about you," Lady Cumberland reiterated, folding her hands across her lap and bending slightly forward.

"I am most anxious that you should marry."

Lord Glencare laughed.

"I thought you were my friend," he said.

"Glencare," the old lady pursued not heeding his remark, "it is useless for me to pretend to you that I am in ignorance of—of many things." She paused. Her hearer's expression clouded. "That being so, and all this very dreadful scandal and so many honoured names involved, you seem to be so broadly, palpably hinted at—"

"I am not responsible for malice."

"Of course not, my dear boy, of course not," Lady Cumberland agreed hastily. "But you are too much a man not to be aware that you have unconsciously given rise to much of it."

Her nephew shifted his position a little.

"Perhaps I have, one never knows," he admitted.

"But you and he were such friends."

"Yes we were, my dear aunt, and as far as I am concerned we shall remain so to the end of all things."

"That is as it should be. It is entirely contrary to my

traditions or I am sure your own to ever even partially desert anyone when they are in trouble."

"I am glad to hear you say so," he observed quickly. "I have always felt the same, and his trouble is so gigantic."

"Disloyalty is a thing of horror," said Lady Cumberland, "but in this particular case—"

"I know what you would say, but I cannot listen—"

"But your name, your reputation—"

"They must take care of themselves." He played impatiently with an old China box that stood on the mantelpiece.

"That is an impossibility, and you know it. Secretly, no doubt, you can continue your friendship, but publicly—"

"I am surprised at you, my dear aunt," Lord Glencare exclaimed. "You contradict the sentiments you expressed a moment ago."

"I only do so in terms, and because the case we now are discussing is in every way so exceptional."

"Yes, it is as exceptional as he himself is, and being so it behoves us to treat him and it in an exceptional manner."

"My dear boy," cried the old lady in dismay, "it is impossible that you can allow your name to be coupled with his at this juncture—"

"It is impossible that it could be otherwise."

Lady Cumberland's face paled.

"You can have no notion how you pain me," she murmured slowly, "I who have always been so devoted to you."

Lord Glencare took her hand in his and raised it gently to his lips.

"I thank you for those words," he replied gently, "and all that they imply."

Lady Cumberland's bright eyes grew a little dim.

"If you would only be guided by me. You cannot gauge what it will mean if you are not," she pursued.

"I think I am prepared."

She shook her head.

"I know that you are not. I see with sight of age which is all revealing."

He was silent.

"It will spell social ostracism, or at least something from which you will never wholly recover."

"Your fears make you over-estimate the importance of the affair."

"That would be a difficult thing to do. I can assure you, Glencare," she continued solemnly, "that it will prove a *débacle* for you."

He did not answer.

"If only he could be persuaded to run away."

"That he will never do, his courage is as lofty as his intellect," he retorted quickly.

Lady Cumberland sighed heavily.

"If one can say so, it is a false courage and will lead to dissolution."

"Besides," Lord Glencare continued, "it would seem shameful to be slinking about the continent a fugitive from

justice. He said so himself only the other day when I went to Chelsea."

"What a pity, what an enormous pity."

"I think it is the only possible attitude for a gentleman to take up."

"And what do you intend to do," she enquired with troubled resignation.

"Be present at Court; if he be acquitted, place the yacht and my cheque book at his disposal."

"And if he is not."

"I can hardly bring myself to think of that," he replied, "but if he is not I shall remain in England and be of what service and consolation I can."

"If that be your fixed intention, my dear boy, it is useless for me to say any more; only I consider it to be more important than ever for you to marry."

"Perhaps I will some day."

Lady Cumberland's expression cleared.

"If only you would do so now," she cried entreatingly.

Lord Glencare drew up a low seat near to her chair.

"There are few things I would not do to please you," he told her.

"There is nothing you could do that would please me half so much."

She resumed the knitting of an olive green silk purse as she spoke.

He smiled a little indulgently as he watched.

"I am aware on whom you have cast your eye," he remarked.

"You could not do better."

"She is certainly remarkably handsome," he concurred.

"Wonderfully so." Lady Cumberland spoke with enthusiasm.

"But hardly tractable," he ventured.

"Dear Ulric, in your experienced hands any woman could be made so."

"You over-estimate my charms, dear aunt."

"But not your position."

"By the way is it not practically settled that she marries young Dunbar?"

"Certainly not," replied Lady Cumberland with the utmost decision.

"I have been misinformed then; it certainly would be a hopeless marriage for her from every point of view."

"I have never approved of that young man," the old lady exclaimed severely.

"I have only seen him two or three times—though I believe there is some enmity between us—a good-looking boy with extravagant tastes who has got into bad hands."

"He appears to do everything and yet he has positively nothing."

"That is a very usual type, not of course on the lofty altitudes in which you move, my august relative."

"I should trust not indeed."

"How some men of my acquaintance exist is a perpetual mental conundrum," Lord Glencare remarked dreamily.

"I am happy to say that I was never good at solving even the simplest of them," Lady Cumberland made answer drily.

"Why should you have been, you have never been brought into contact with them."

"I don't think anything like that is really becoming to a gentlewoman."

The speaker never by any chance made use of that ugly latter-day word lady.

He smiled.

"Perhaps you are right. I always pity women because they miss so much in life that is really amusing, though of course they are protected from much else that is far from amusing."

"I am afraid I do not quite follow you."

"It is not likely that you should, dear aunt."

"I consider that it is very reprehensible the way in which my set neglect the serious interests of life nowadays, substituting golf sticks for tambour frames and foreigners for English husbands," pronounced Lady Cumberland while her busy fingers flew in and out plying the needles.

"You were fortunate enough to have been born in the early Victorian era."

"The only possible period for really nice people to make their appearance in," was the quick retort.

"Dear aunt, how delightfully singular your ideas are," he cried gaily.

"I could wish that they might become more general," was the reply.

"I cannot listen to such rank heresy," Lord Glencare exclaimed.

"Let us go back to your own affairs then."

Jane Cumberland was in no wise daunted.

He raised his eyebrows with a patient expression.

"O persecutor ! do with thy servant as thou wilt."

"Well, then, will you promise an old woman who loves you and who is not long for this world to think over what she has said."

"That I can certainly promise."

"Then will you come to Ardfert for the 12th," she asked eagerly.

"If you really wish it."

"I do ; you can take so much off my shoulders."

"While you are plotting to put much on to mine, is that the idea ?"

"No, there shall be no scheming on my part, I assure you, you shall be left free to observe."

"Lady Henry and Miss Wyverne are to be there of course."

"Most certainly."

"Ah ! and who else ?"

"The usual crowd : the Nairns and the Strathallans, and the Ramsays of Kenlis."

"Heavy on hand, my dear aunt," the listener commented.

"I am sorry you think that. What is your objection?"

"They are people whom my mind has outgrown; one changes mentally no less than physically as the years pass."

"But the Strathallans for instance are they—? The speaker paused for a word.

"He is a prig and she is a prude," Lord Glencare hastened to say.

"But what of the Nairns? he is such an excellent shot, while her conversation is so disjointed that it always reminds me of a French lesson book."

"Then there is Allan Ramsey, he is a delightful companion while she is such a perfect foil."

"Yes," agreed her nephew, "Lady Ramsey's silences are so engaging that one cannot but believe in her wit."

"And I thought of asking Elsie Irnham," continued Lady Cumberland.

"By all means, she is a tonic anywhere."

The old lady frowned.

"I was always fond of Elsie in spite of many things!" she said slowly.

"She always contrives to fill life with an agitated interest."

"I believe she has quite ceased to give rise to gossip since her second marriage otherwise—"

"Set your mind at rest, everything might have been said of Elsie de Bremont because she did everything,

nothing can be said of Lady Irnham because she does nothing."

"How dull she must find it," murmured Lady Cumberland absently.

"She is religious; they invariably take that last."

"My dear boy, you speak as if religion was a kind of epidemic."

"I think it is in some forms," Lord Glencare said.

Lady Cumberland sighed.

"I am afraid that Lent is not observed as it used to be, nowadays I observe that it throws but a flimsy garment over godless pleasures."

"Lent is always associated in my mind with lettuces," her nephew answered.

"It is such a pity because you used to make such a pretty little choir boy," Lady Cumberland observed inconsequently.

"Memories are pernicious things, dear aunt, you should be above such a weakness."

"I am afraid I have a few failings," his aunt observed doubtfully.

"Not in my eyes at any rate," Lord Glencare told her. "And now," he continued, taking from his pocket a flat pale blue enamelled watch, "I must be thinking of going."

"And you will not disappoint on the 12th," she enquired anxiously.

"Not on any account," he reassured her.

"And you will—"

"I will." He smiled down at her as he spoke.

"That is like my own dear boy."

"But I promise nothing farther."

"I must be satisfied."

Then with his accustomed ceremony Glencare took his leave.

Lady Cumberland sat for some minutes gazing out on the long stretch of terrace and beyond that to the quaint prim Dutch garden with its high clipped hedges. Then she rose slowly leaning on her gold and ebony stick and rang the bell.

* * * * *

The season rolled on to its usual close.

The Clubs talked of little else save the awful finale to a certain trial and of the terrible sentence that had been passed on one of the greatest men of the nineteenth century; women whispered of it in their boudoirs and sighed over the pity and the horror of it when they recalled the splendid and gracious figure of the man himself.

His friends—and they were many—agreed that he was the victim of one of those periodical outbursts of hypocrisy which occur every now and then in British public life and are intended to show how virtuous and superior the English are. A few craven spirits rejoiced secretly, many more did so openly.

Then the curtain closed down for the nonce on this tragedy of an ignoble revenge.

Society dispersed to its various destinations. Lady Henry

Wyverne and her daughter remained in London. The former determined to husband all resources for the autumn campaign, that was to commence at Ardfert, and end—she trusted—at St. Peter's, Eaton Square.

Between mother and daughter in those latter days relations were somewhat strained. Helen, despite all remonstrances, had persisted in continuing a friendship with her cousin that Lady Henry not only deplored but detested.

Two or three scenes there had been when the language of lamentation had been worn almost threadbare.

"Where do you imagine it's going to end," Lady Henry had demanded in tones of angry enquiry.

Her daughter was silent. They were together in the drawing-room at John Street, which however was not flower filled then but wore a dismantled end-of-the-season air.

"You cannot be mad enough to suppose that you could ever marry Dallas."

"I only know that I should like to," was the reply.

Hearing which her mother had turned right round in her chair and regarded her daughter with a look of dismayed incredulity.

"Marry him," she echoed "marry Dallas who has hardly got enough to— But it is idle to even discuss such an absurdity," the elder broke off impatiently.

"I did not say that I intended to marry him," Helen interposed, "I merely said I should like to."

"And how dare you even hint at such a thing to me; it would be my death-blow," Lady Henry dissolved into

hysterical sobs for a few seconds. Her daughter waited until the paroxysm had passed then observed quietly :

"I wish you would not agitate yourself so unnecessarily, mama. "I am only too fully aware in what direction my duty lies, but nevertheless that can't help my caring for Dallas and he for me."

"Then if you know that it is useless why do you insist upon seeing him and giving him dance after dance as you did at the Savoy the other night?" Lady Henry enquired with bitter fierceness lifting a dishevelled face up from her inadequate handkerchief and looking at her daughter.

Helen who was standing by the mantleshef tapped her foot against the fender while her mother continued :

"What do you imagine people are saying."

"Imagination was never my strong point."

"Don't be flippant, please, it sits very ill on you."

"I simply don't know what you mean by your remark, mama, and you must remember it is my first season."

"First season or last you know perfectly well that no young girl can get herself talked about with a penniless outsider, whose reputation even is not what it might be."

"I know there *are* tales about Dallas," Helen admitted reluctantly.

"Tales that will become certainties before long at the rate he is advancing," Lady Henry retorted with malicious pleasure.

The girl threw up her head.

"Then is not that the very time not to desert him

when others—" she demanded proudly and the fine eyes flashed.

"Desert! what a ridiculous expression," Lady Henry echoed scornfully. "It is the very time when sensible people know that the hour has come when to be—shall we say shortsighted—becomes a duty."

"I know what you mean perfectly well, but I shall not subscribe to it."

"You are cruel and ungrateful to your mother who has worked and sacrificed all for you."

Lady Alicia began getting ready to cry again.

"I am neither cruel nor ungrateful, on the contrary, I am a model daughter, have I not set your doubts at rest? Do you wish me to go farther and say that the highest bidder at Ardfert or any other matrimonial hostel can have me?"

"I should like to know that, in the event of a proper offer, you would prove sensible," whispered her mother.

"Rest assured that I shall not fail you," Helen Wyverne said as she opened the door and drew it closely to behind her.

Two hours later Dallas Dunbar and his cousin paced slowly up and down the almost deserted flower walk in Kensington gardens, where the roar of the traffic reached them only intermittently and where there was no chance of encountering any acquaintance.

One or two passers by turned round with an involuntary exclamation of admiration at the unusual beauty of the girl

and the fair troubled good looks of the young man, otherwise they were quite alone.

Something approaching a perfect comprehension existed between those two, so that when Helen had told him of the little scene of the afternoon, she knew that it was no lack of love for herself that made Dallas Dunbar answer :

"Of course your mother is quite right but she needn't be so confoundedly hard with it. Heaven knows fate has been unkind enough to both of us without anything more."

"I know also that she is quite right, Dal, we are two expensive paupers to whom poverty would be hideous. It is not possible I think to care for any one when one is worried."

"I could care for you under any and all circumstances," he murmured.

"You think so now because you are in love."

"I always shall be with you, my peerless Helen," the young man said.

His companion's lovely face grew clouded.

"I wish I could think so, Dal, it would be a consolation in the long future. I may want some belief to cling to, women are but feeble beings," the girl added prompted by some vague feeling of prescience.

"I hate to hear you talk like that, Helen," he exclaimed, "if there was any way in which I could even prove my utter devotion to you."

She did not answer for a second or so. They had come to the end of the walk and directed their footsteps on to the grass under the avenue of trees.

"Do you really mean that, Dal?" Helen Wyverne asked.

"Have I ever said anything to you that I have not meant?"

The girl shook her head.

"Only tell me what I can do."

"Then, Dal, my dear, you can prove it to me by giving up lots of things."

"Gambling for instance," he suggested flushing.

"Yes, that is what I would like."

"You don't approve of it?"

"No, and especially when ugly suggestions accompany it."

"What suggestions?"

"Don't ask me, Dallas, I know of course that they are monstrously untrue but they hurt badly."

"I can imagine what you mean," he remarked, hitting the grass with his light cane. "How charming one's friends are!" he added bitterly and the handsome weak mouth curled.

They went a little further in a silence which Helen was the first to break.

"Well," she enquired gently.

"Honestly, Helen, there is nothing in the world you could have asked that I would not have rendered but—" he paused.

"Just what I have asked. Is that what you would tell me, Dallas?"

"Yes," he murmured, and he was consumed with a sensation of miserable shame. "And you will not forgive or understand."

"There is nothing I think I would not forgive you, about the understanding I'm not so sure."

"Thank God for the one anyway," he said, and his voice held a relieved cadence.

"But," she entreated, "tell me one thing; there is not a hint of truth in their vile slanders?"

"Not a word of truth," he muttered, looking straight before him into the evening spaces.

"It's my turn to render up thanksgiving now. It is merely then a craze with you." She glanced at him.

"No, it is necessity, Helen, my loved one, the same hideous, haunting, hateful necessity that is going to part us one of those days."

"Necessity," she echoed.

"I'm so heavily dipped, Helen, and at cards I'm so curiously lucky," he spoke hurriedly. "Work, I know, would be better," he pursued in apparent justification, "but as you are well aware the dear old Dad brought me up so that positively I don't know of any way in which I could make my living for one twenty-four hours."

"The necessity is hardly likely to arise," Helen Wyverne remarked.

"No, just so, but if it ever did."

"Well, Dallas darling," the girl continued fondly, "I beg of you to guard your name, whatever else you may do or leave undone, don't throw it to the rabble."

"If ever I fail to do that," he answered solemnly, "I should not live to face it."

Helen Wyverne shivered in the warm evening air.

"Hush," she said, "such a notion is horrible."

They were nearing the tea kiosk as she made the last remark.

"We had better part here, Dal, there is no need for any one to know that we have been together."

"As you will," he assented.

They slackened pace as they neared the gates.

"When do you leave, Helen," he enquired.

"On the 10th and spend the night at Inverness. Mama does not care to travel straight through."

"Whose going to be there," he continued in a tone of gloomy foreboding.

"Mostly Scotch people, I believe, whom I don't know, and I believe Lord Glencare."

"I knew it," the young man exclaimed savagely.

"Knew what?" Helen Wyverne exclaimed.

"That's the old lady's game, ably abetted by my affectionate relative, your revered mother. Bah! it's sickening."

"Don't be so imbecile, Dallas, Lord Glencare never looks at me."

"Oh! the air of the moors works wonders."

"He would not have a chance to even glance my way if you were only going to be there," she resumed softly.

"Yes, there is indeed every prospect of Lady Cumberland including me in her house party. Why she couldn't even see me at the Foreign Office the other night."

"She is rather shortsighted," Helen made lame excuse.

"She must be seeing that we were wedged together on one step for fully ten minutes." The speaker smiled grimly.

"When are you leaving, Dal?"

"To-morrow. I've scraped an invitation for Goodwood."

"Who to?"

"People named Shifton—frightfully common and still more frightfully rich."

Helen Wyverne's beautiful mouth curled scornfully.

"Who are they?"

"My sweet dear, what a question," he cried, "he, the man, made a million or some such trifle by a corner in rotten eggs."

"Fancy your consenting to know such people," the girl exclaimed in pained reproach.

"And after where do you go?"

"For ten days at Cowes on the yacht of two very pleasant Dutch fellows whom I met at the Hague last year."

"And they—are they?"

"Absolutely all right, my loved one, as far as position and everything else goes."

"That is better." Helen Wyverne gave a relieved sigh.

"And now, Dal, bitter as the word is, you and I must say farewell for a few weeks at least."

"You'll write," he asked taking her hand in his.

They looked at each other and tears were in both pairs of eyes.

"Of course I will," he answered.

"And you'll be good, Dal."

"If I can't be good I'll promise at least to be cautious, my precious one," was his answer.

"Good-bye and God bless you, Dallas," and then Helen Wyverne left him and went towards Alexandra gate where the brougham waited.

The young man watched her for a few seconds—the fine imperial carriage, the elastic step, the small head so beautifully set on her shoulders, then he turned away with something almost resembling a groan and hailing an empty hansom that had just deposited a fare drove away in the direction of Piccadilly.

Lady Henry Wyverne had received no invitation from either friend or foe for Goodwood or Cowes, so that she and Helen spent the intervening days between then and 10th August in London, engaged principally in holding a grand review of their wardrobes combined on the former's part with a rueful perusal of her bank book, which spoke out with the disagreeable candour habitual to such volumes. They were not pleasant hours, and neither was town where the streets were empty and the grass in the parks the colour of dried toast. It was an occasion for

reflection, especially for those persons who rarely indulge in such an apt-to-be disappointing pursuit.

Lady Henry could not but feel and with undoubted justification that the season had not been what it should have been. But then what in life is ever really that? They had gone to practically everything worth going to; they had been received with much cordiality; old friends who might well have forgotten welcomed.

‘Dear Alicia’ once more in their midst. Had felicitated her on the possession of so lovely a daughter. Young men, some very eligible, had fluttered round Helen and then suddenly like frightened fawns had retired while she, her mother, had sat with the dear dull dowagers and puzzled her brain in wonderment, while the world—her world which was of course the only world—had solved the reason.

There had been two proposals certainly—one from the son of an ex-Cabinet minister of which she had told Helen nothing and the other had been from an American whose sister had married into the Peerage. But Lady Henry had the horror of complete ignorance where his great country was concerned and thought she would rather see her child reduced to accepting only an English squire, whose quarterings were unimpeachable and whose accent did not give her the earache.

Those had been all that the possible matrimonial bag had contained, so it was productive of mental anguish to read of the engagement of the Marquis of Brandon—a

young and extremely wealthy Roman Catholic peer—to Lord Killmacarthy's second daughter.

He who for as long as she Alicia could remember had spent his time in wandering from place to place playing the part of a regular old pirate, ready to pluck up his tent pole with most suspicious haste, seeking pastures new when the forage round about him began to show signs of social or financial exhaustion. And yet Betty was going to become a marchioness, Betty with a snub nose—Lady Henry described it as snub—and a freckled face. Certainly her eyes had been good she must admit that, but after all what are a pair of eyes?

How difficult it was to accept these inscrutable decrees of the Almighty with anything approaching to a courteous (to say nothing of a Christian) resignation.

However, it was perhaps a great mistake to think so much on the past, in which one could certainly never alter any single thing, and Hope and Ardfert invited her with beckoning hand. Ardfert and its romantic possibilities, its wide stretching heathery gorse-strewn moorland with the sea beyond.

How beautiful Helen would appear against that entrancing background, Helen with her complexion which was like milk flushed just to rose hue. Her mother's spirits began to insensibly rise at the pleasing vision. It must prove one long opportunity. There would not only be the days—Glencare she knew was not much attached to shooting—but the evenings when they would dance

to the pipes in the old ball room with its great flags and stags' heads.

But would they dance? She was not so sure, with so sober a party as Jane Cumberland generally surrounded herself with. Well, never mind about the dancing, one could not expect everything, any way there would be the tenants' ball and the Northern Meetings.

Things after all were not so bad when you approached them in a proper way. That at least Lady Henry felt she evidently did. But if one was literally compelled to take unpleasant alternatives into account, the immediate few weeks did not yield what she as a fond parent had every reason to expect, still, what then?

Could she—could they by any miracle accomplish an early winter season in town? that season when pleasures are fewer and people consequently thrown more together? the season in which the crop of late autumn engagements bear harvest at various altars. It would be most desirable but it would be extremely difficult. She, Alicia, in case of unpleasant eventualities would have to descend to that lowering, degrading occupation of considering ways and means.

Oh this money! this money! or rather the want of it, for what was it not responsible? Honestly it could make one feel more utterly miserable than any other anxiety in the entire world, with no exception whatsoever.

The sorrows of the affections one could overcome or in time live down, but the loss of money or its absence who

could forget or evade that? True there was the question of health to be considered but even that was ameliorated by means.

Lady Henry Wyverne's mood of optimism began to fade a little, then she came to a sudden resolve, she would give her poor harassed brain a rest until compelled by Kismet to work it again. She would—this decision made her feel quite magnanimous—leave matters in the hands of Providence, though of His ability in managing social affairs, she had, although a pious woman, always entertained grave doubts. Having arrived at this conclusion she felt glad to see her maid enter with a large box of travelling hats from the milliners.

CHAPTER IV

ARDFERT HOUSE was a fine place not far from Invergordon with several thousand acres of shooting and a grouse moor. The accommodation was ample and the scenery magnificent. Here, on the evening of the 11th of August, was assembled most of the guests, including the Wyvernes, drinking a late tea in the hall which was also a library. Lady Cumberland was no longer the grande dame of point lace and diamonds but was arrayed in a short tweed skirt and coat and a hat that was a cut between a Glengarry bonnet and a Sola topee. She appeared very comfortable in her thick boots and in high spirits.

Lady Henry declared mentally that dear Jane Cumberland looked really dreadful while answering sweetly to her hostess's enquiry as to the journey, that she was really not in the least fatigued.

Helen was radiant as she ate Scotch scones and talked to a young naval officer who had come over from the Fleet for a day or two. The rest of the company consisted of three elderly men, the typical Scotch laird type, Lords

Strathallan and Nairn respectively ; while the two women—one young and pretty, the other about forty—who appeared anxious to avoid being too much in the strong light that would intrude from without, completed a somewhat uninteresting group in which dramatic possibilities were certainly at a discount.

Lady Cumberland discussed the game prospects for the morrow with combined science and knowledge to the company in general or in particular as occasion arose.

Lady Henry sipped her tea in comfortable silence while devoutly hoping that she would not be called upon to tramp too far on the morrow. Her life—partaking as it did of one long self sacrifice—she trusted would not involve the additional one of going out after little brown birds, which though delicious in a pie, never would seem to her worth the trouble of pursuing, especially over stubbly ground.

“ I expect my nephew in two or three days time,” Lady Cumberland was saying, “ it is not often that he comes North, although he is such an excellent shot.”

“ I shall be glad to see Glencare again, we haven't met since we were in Nairobi together one winter,” remarked Lord Nairn.

“ You'll find him little changed, time—usually so talkative—seems to pass him by.”

“ Time is life's one incurable ill,” said Lord Strathallan. He was sixty-five and he was married to a young wife.

“ That's all he knows about life,” reflected Lady Henry thinking of the speaker's rent roll.

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Lady Cumberland, "I can't say I agree with you. I really never began to appreciate things till I had turned forty."

"Ah ! but the world always appreciated you. That makes a world of difference," was the rejoinder.

"It seems somewhat too flattering an interpretation," said Lady Cumberland. Then followed some ten minutes or so of the usual talk till Lady Cumberland, looking at her watch, remarked as she did so, "We keep very early hours and I feel sure you would all like a rest before dinner? Will you follow me." Jane Cumberland always showed guests to their rooms herself except at Cumberland, where great state was kept up.

Just then the butler appeared—such a butler, more like a monument than a man—carrying a telegram on a salver, which he handed to his mistress. When she had read it her face paled, then she looked up and said in muffled tones :

"My nephew has met with an accident and is unable to join us."

"Oh ! it's quite slight, only a sprain," she hastily explained in answer to the general enquiries. Under cover of the subsequent murmur expressive of disappointment Lady Cumberland passed the message to Lady Henry. It had been handed in at Cowes and said :

"Have sprained both ankles coming down Club steps. Impossible travel. Accept my most profound regrets and tender regards, my dear aunt.—GLENCARE."

Alicia Wyverne read it with quivering lip and when Lady

Cumberland came downstairs again and rejoined her she merely remarked :

“Both ankles.”

“Yes,” answered the elder woman drily, “it almost sounds like carelessness.”

Looking back afterwards, Lady Henry always thought that the three weeks she managed by a superhuman effort to spend at Ardfert were quite the dulllest of her by no means very hilarious existence.

The men were out all day, so were the women. Helen got up an absurd friendship with Mr. Dalrymple King, the young officer, while her mother almost dislocated her mouth yawning. In the evenings the party discussed the bag and the prospects of the morrow after dinner. The ladies gathered in the drawing-room and had a little music while the men remained in the dining room decanting their hostesses fine old port into their somewhat somnolent selves. True the weather was really glorious, which seemed to Lady Henry only to aggravate matters. It appeared as if it were laughing at her.

Lady Cumberland herself took too keen and genuine a delight in her Highland home to have leisure or much opportunity to allow Glencare's defection to hold her attention for long. The disappointment at first had been great but it had passed, while Alicia's preference for a chair and a book to walking, shooting or fishing rather annoyed the older woman who, despite her years, could land her salmon in fine fashion still.

Therefore it is only the truth to say that, when the carriage that was to take Lady Henry Wyverne away stood under the big entrance, it was decidedly with the questionable cordiality involved in speeding the parting guest that Lady Cumberland accompanied her guests to the door.

Lady Henry looked back once before they turned the first corner of the brief drive, but her late hostess had already disappeared within doors. The house stood gray, cold but picturesque, its many windows glinted by the dying sunlight. This was the termination of the visit from which she had dreamt so much. The mockery of all human wishes and desires !

From Ardfert she and her daughter went to a small shooting lodge beyond Elgin in the almost extreme North. It was rented by a connection of the former who was the widow of a soldier officer. It was a pretty square built box of a place set almost on a cliff, having originally been built by a retired Admiral who, contrary to most sailors, felt that he could not be too near to the sea, hence a large flag staff placed right on the rocky promontory. It was extremely remote, with tracts of heather and gorse stretching away on every other side of it. The shooting was of the rough order. The interior was comfortable, bearing however about as much resemblance to the place they had just quitted as a Lancaster Gate boarding-house to the Savoy Hotel.

Here were gathered a party of so styled smart people, those who are in reality clinging to the end of the fringe of the real thing and who are inclined to be

somewhat noisy and distinctly racy. The hostess, Mrs. Withers Wilson, was a pretty woman who wanted to enjoy life and who more often than not succeeded in doing so. She greeted her dear kind Alicia with effusive warmth after which she led her into a roomy, square, general-sitting room, the six windows of which gazed on to the ocean and where they were alone as the rest had not yet returned from rabbit shooting. A peat wood fire blazed on the hearth. The chairs were capacious, the views delicious. When Lady Henry and her hostess—Helen preferred a stroll so excused herself—were comfortably ensconced a man servant in tweeds appeared with tea.

"One of my soldier servants," explained Mrs. Wilson, "I won't have a maid in the place: an experiment of mine, but it has worked splendidly."

"You carry out your old affection for the Junior Service then," Lady Henry remarked as she stirred her tea. "I do observe." She pointed to the Army list that lay on an adjacent table.

"Sometimes I sleep with it under my pillow," Mrs. Wilson amended laughingly.

"Really Bertha you are too absurdly young and frivolous."

"Of course I always was and intend to remain so. Then their conversation drifted to purely family matters until the younger as if suddenly remembering asked, "Well, and did you have a good time at Ardfert?"

"I had ample leisure to meditate on my debts and difficulties if that is what you mean," observed Lady Henry.

"*Quel horreur*" cried the other lifting very white well shaped hands in pretty protest.

"No, my dear, I certainly did not enjoy myself," Lady Henry continued. "The party was as dull as the ten commandments set to music."

"You will find matters somewhat reversed here. I hope you will not be shocked."

"Who is here," enquired Lady Henry declining a second cup of tea.

"Nobody I think that you know, only eight altogether : four brother officers of dear Albert's, unattached, one dear sweet girl, and my friend Bobbie Markwell and his quite annoyingly bridey bride and now yourselves. Next week we shall change again."

"Did you go to Goodwood?" was Lady Henry Wyverne's next enquiry, not feeling much interested in her fellow guests.

"Goodwood? no, my love, my credit would not have allowed of it, but of course I went to Cowes."

"I adore Cowes," murmured her friend drowsily, the warmth and the smell of the peat fire having its effect on her.

Mrs. Withers Wilson rattled on :

"So do I, and I always manage to literally snatch an invitation off our mutual enemy, Evelyn Gore-Booth, and as I know she loathes giving it naturally I feel all the greater pleasure in receiving it."

"Naturally," was the sleepy comment.

"There were heaps of people and the extravagance of

the dresses ! I don't know where the day gowns are going to end, just as in the evening one wonders where they really begin. We shall never be able to live up to this new era."

"Meet anyone interesting," asked Lady Alicia with a shade more somnolence in her voice.

"No one particularly, I'm not in the Squadron set as you know. We were a pleasant party at Evelyn's cottage Ornee but no names that you would know. I ran up against poor Dallas Dunbar as I was coming away and asked him up here."

"Asked him up here ?" Her guest was fully awakened.

"Yes, why not ; he was so hard hit at Goodwood."

"And is he here ?" Lady Henry enquired in an agitated whisper.

"No, coming the end of next week."

The hearer breathed again.

"I am glad of that, because there will be time for us to leave, Helen and I."

"Oh ! I understand, my dear," Mrs. Wilson said, the memory of gossip that she had heard dawning on her.

"Please say nothing to Helen," entreated Helen's mother.

"Naturally not."

"You quite understand, Bertha, how completely other are my views where she is concerned."

"Certainly I do, why the girl is really a beauty."

Lady Henry sighed.

"She resembles her poor dear father in a marked degree, which is not surprising."

"Poor Dallas, what a pity he hasn't money, they would make such an ideal couple."

"I do not think so," Lady Henry replied briefly. "Even with money Dallas would not be acceptable to me."

Mrs. Wilson sighed, she had all a woman's interest in and pity for a handsome young man who was also well bred and had charming manners.

Just then the sound of voices from outside reached them. The guest rose.

"May I go and rest till dinner?" she asked.

When Lady Henry reached her room, which was square in shape, like the one she had just quitted, with two windows looking on to the moor, and two others looking seawards, she sank into an easy chair by the fire and closed her eyes. Here, an hour later, her maid found her.

"There are three letters, madame, just come," she announced.

"All for me," stretching out a languid hand.

"No, my lady, one for Miss Helen."

"Very well, I will give it to her, Evans."

The maid withdrew into a small, cupboard-like dressing-room, and closed the door. She knew she had done right in taking Helen's letter to her mother.

Lady Henry having examined her own correspondence put them aside. The third was in Dallas' handwriting. She did not hesitate a moment. She did not open it, she

was too well bred for that, but she flung it right into the heart of the glowing fire and watched it burn and shrivel with frowning brows.

CHAPTER V

IN a sparsely furnished flat in Shaftesbury Avenue two men sat together and faced financial famine. It was eleven of the clock in the forenoon. The dull and dreary light of the November morning struggled and fought with the dirt on the window-panes and penetrated to the interior.

The table laid with not over-fine—or for the matter of that over-clean—linen bore the remains of a meagre and unappetising breakfast, in which letters of forbidding exterior, Creme de Menthe, and ends of cigarettes bore a leading part.

In the only chair with any pretension to comfort sat the younger of the two occupants, wrapped in a bath-gown. Fair and florid with a figure much too inclined to stray, he wore the peevish expression of a sulky, overgrown schoolboy.

“What is going to become of us my dear Baron?” he exclaimed irritably, glancing across at his friend who, immaculately attired—but with the shadow of Carey Street

in his eyes—sat at a most uncomfortable angle on the edge of a couch that boasted a staring brocatelle cover.

"I cannot say. I cannot even think." The speaker spread out his long thin fingers. He was German, but spoke English without a trace of accent. "The game, the game is up, people grow more than suspicious, writs judgment summons, bankruptcy notices, cheques not paid, Elsa growing nasty. Ah! Mein Gott, it is more than any man can stand." He flicked the ashes savagely from his cigar and ground them into the carpet with his heel.

"Well something has to be done," the other retorted still with a distinct grievance in his tone. "I got my notice to quit before I was awake. There isn't a thing left to pawn, and Dealton says his wages are three months' overdue," and Morrison Salutaris, commonly known as Sally, glanced once more across at his friend, his off colour marble-like eyes inviting some suggestion.

There was silence. The roar of the traffic, the cry of newsboys reached them as an intensely irritating punctuation to their conversation. Lamps showed like blots of blinding white through the London fog that had gathered above and was fast closing down.

"The game is up," repeated Baron von Kensig, breaking the silence, "the game is—"

"Nonsense, my dear Baron," cried his companion rising, and helping himself to a fresh cigarette, "it is nothing of the kind, we are simply in a hole, out of which we've got to get. After all it is not the first time. Let us think. Help

yourself to a liqueur, and give me one. There is nothing like alcohol to solve such an infernal difficulty as ours. To quote the poet 'let us review the scene.' If we could get away South we could easily catch some mugs, even if only for small sums."

The Baron curled his blonde moustache gloomily.

"How can we go? there is not a money-lender in London," he said.

"Money-lenders be damned, of course there isn't, disgusting race, who wants consols as security, and heaven knows what as interest. The fact is, Baron, it's most unfortunate that we neither of us can go into any Club, and that there are so many beasts who can and will talk."

"How hard is life," said the Baron, finishing his liqueur, "for those who try to make an honest living, ah! how hard," whereat they both laughed sadly.

Friends of five years standing, partners in much, plotters and schemers in all, those two were well-known figures in most European capitals, marked in some, suspected in all, but carrying off their card sharpening with such consummate audacity as to make even the authorities reluctant to move against them. Heads of a gang whose meshes spread far, wide, and deep, embracing so many people, so many acquaintances, that the ordinary person could never guess, scarcely less credit, the bare possibility of so ingenious, so elaborately worked out a system of fraud.

Morrison Salutaris was born a gentleman, being the son of an English general, who however had been more distinguished as a manufacturer than as a defender of his country. The ways of commerce, however, were not adapted to the tastes of his son, who though always on speaking terms with his people whose aggressive respectability he had more than once found a most desirable harbour of refuge, spent his life in travelling, his stock-in-trade a mountain of luggage, a man servant, some jewellery, a manner that for insolence could not easily have been surpassed and an easily gained reputation for spurious wit acquired by passing off poor Oscar Wilde's brilliant bon mots as his own.

The inconceivable meanness of such conduct in no way troubling his elastic conscience.

Thus trading on his father's reputation, apparently secure within the armour of his own unparalleled effrontery, indifferent to all laws of man or God, encumbered by neither morals nor scruples Morrison Salutaris contrived as a rule to lead a very fairly lucrative and pleasant existence.

It was a life, of course, that had its shadows, and those somewhat far reaching as instanced in the present. It was a life made up of contriving, dodging, avoiding, of lies, excuses, of every conceivable kind of financial hide and seek, a hard life, making far more demands on body and brain than that of honest toil. Still one that many follow and would not quit even if they could.

Rudolph von Kensig, once a waiter in a small and malodorous restaurant off the Tottenham Court Road was

now a self-constituted Hanoverian noble, and reckoned one of the finest *ecartè* players in England or abroad.

Of more than presentable appearance and good manners Von Kensig possessed a heart. He would help a friend in distress and go out of his way to do anyone a good turn. Conscience he had absolutely none. Clothes he possessed in abundance and a faculty for evading consequences hardly short of miraculous.

Impressed by Morrison's parentage and afraid of Morrison himself, these two went about like dogs on a coupling chain. Travelling up and down Europe, taking a run into Africa, a flying visit across the Atlantic, a peep at the Pyramids, a stroll in Monte Carlo, a promenade in Paris, or a temporary and enforced rest in London.

The Baron stood now staring down at the hurrying crowds without, his hands thrust deep in his empty pockets, his fair impassive countenance overcast.

Carefully Morrison pared his immaculate nails, leaning against the mantleshef as he did so. There was a long and dreary pause. Suddenly the Baron gave an exclamation.

"There goes that fellow Cave-Browne," he cried facing round, "I wonder if he could help; no harm in trying any way." So saying he snatched his hat and dived hurriedly down the stairs to the entrance below.

Left alone Morrison rang the bell which was answered by a servant whose face and manner was indeed a wonder lesson—and might have covered—perhaps did cover—who knows what? Ordering him to clear the table his master

disappeared into a small bedroom on the right. In less than a few minutes' time the Baron's eager guttural tones could be heard reascending the stairs, crossed by Cave-Browne's easy, even-toned voice, as he and his newly found friend entered the sitting-room where the breakfast things had been replaced by spirit decanters, Apollinaris and a box of Corona; Coronas, which are the chosen cigars of the cult of card sharpeners, or as they prefer to call it—the "profession."

The Baron pulled forward Morrison's favourite chair and cordially invited his guest to be seated. He was indeed heartily glad to see him. For although they were but the merest acquaintances the Baron knew to a vague extent about Cave-Browne's tastes; indeed on the first occasion of their meeting, which had been on board a P. and O. bound for Cairo, they had had a game together just to pass the evening. He knew moreover that he hovered on a still desirable social frontier, and still had the entrée to a few decent houses and would indeed be most useful—if amenable—nevertheless the utmost and most delicate caution was essential.

On this point no one was better informed than the Baron and his friend. At that moment Morrison was making an unusually careful toilet, one that indeed should defy the unspoken criticism of their visitor's insolent turquoise eyes. Meanwhile the Baron, feeling that they were about to tread on somewhat difficult ground with a man with whom they had as yet had no direct dealings, mixed two dusky complexioned

brandies and apollinaris, chatting the while on various non-committal topics. He would wait and depend on Morrison's tact and grace to open the ball when he came in.

Cave-Browne listened while he mentally surveyed the room filled with what in America would be called August furniture and drew his own conclusions. Skilled reader of every kind of financial barometer that he was, he sipped his drink meditatively and wondered what they wanted of him, so suddenly caught and seized as he had been.

Just then Morrison Salutaris entered, dressed in grey, heavily perfumed and wearing the fatuously cordial smile that he could always command for the benefit of any one whom he thought might be of use.

The greeting was very cordial at least on one side. Morrison seating himself on the sofa pulled his trousers well up thus displaying highly polished boots with his favourite dove coloured cloth tops, about which the initiated used to make stupid jokes relative to the mildness of the bird and the wisdom of the serpent.

"And how is it that you are in town at this season?" he enquired. "I thought it was only poor devils like Von Kensig and I who were compelled to endure this disgusting climate," saying which he raised his eyeglass, worn on a very broad black ribbon, and stared angrily out of the window to where the fog, now quite yellow, fought a duel with the street lights.

"Well, I hope it may comfort you to know that you are not the solitary exceptions of a beneficent Providence's

carelessness," the visitor answered in his slow tones, gazing across at Morrison who shifted his seat a little before exclaiming abruptly,

"How is the world going with you? Well or ill?" a question hardly warranted by the slightness of their acquaintance.

"Confoundedly ill," replied Cave-Browne with conviction, by no manner of means resenting the enquiry.

"Ah so," commented Von Kensig raising his eyebrows and contriving to throw some kindly concern into his voice.

Wireless telegraphy passed from his brains to that of Morrison who said,

"Then we are indeed the Holy Trinity. Is it possible, do you think, to do some business together?"

"What kind of business?" enquired Cave-Browne with a look of preternatural innocence.

Morrison reddened below his collar and felt he detested this very superior and supercilious looking man sitting opposite. Mentally he registered the question for future reference and answered quietly and with a fine assumption of ease,

"My dear fellow, I think you must know that Von Kensig and I are gamblers, devoted, in fact, to play and for high stakes." He paused, the visitor bowed his head and Von Kensig began to move about the room. Salutaris continued, knocking a cigarette against his knee as he did so, "I may say that our luck is quite extraordinary, in fact we hardly ever lose. Now if you know any man who will play, just for

the pure pleasure of the thing—preferably out of England—we are quite prepared to pay all travelling expenses and give you a share of the profits.” Again he paused, like a good orator, not wishing to mar his statement by any matter in any way extraneous.

Morrison thought he had correctly read his man.

Cave-Browne took his cigar from his mouth and crossed one foot over the other.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “I think I understand,” and again the look came into his eyes that Morrison felt he should soon grow to loathe more than he had ever loathed anything except work.

“Yes,” he assented, “if so do you know anybody?”

Von Kensing had paused in his walk and was leaning against the sideboard, feeling as a drowning man might, who discerns the faint outline of a ship on the horizon.

“I think I do. In fact I know that I do,” Browne replied. “My friend Dunbar knows two men in Brussels.”

“What would they lose?” The speaker’s eyes were bulging and his manner for once perfectly natural.

“Eight, possibly ten, thousand pounds and that easily.”

The Baron whistled softly the first bar of Weber’s last waltz.

“They would not be suspicious?” Morrison asked, edging nearer to Cave-Browne.

“Suspicious! what do you mean. Why should they be? They are very old friends of his, and Dunbar is a friend of mine.”

"Of course, of course, my dear fellow, I beg your pardon," exclaimed Morrison hastily, "and you really think this can be managed and at once?"

"I don't think," answered the other coolly, "it is too tedious a process, I am sure."

"When can we start?" asked Morrison rising from his seat.

"Any time if they are at home. If you will pay for a reply paid wire, we can find out," said Cave-Browne, who had not the slightest intention of dipping into his own chillily lined pocket for even the price of a telegram.

"Naturally delighted, pray write it and my man shall send it off," Morrison said going over to a writing-table.

There was a little feeling of dismay trickling down his backbone, for neither he nor the Baron had the price of a telegram between them, an odious fact that it would be sheer lunacy to let such a man as this even suspect. The wire was duly written, cordially, and even extravagantly worded.

Morrison left the room with it and after a confidential talk verging on the imploring with his man that individual promised to borrow the necessary from somewhere or someone and get it off. A little relieved his master returned to the sitting-room where the visitor was just preparing to depart.

"I shall return about five," he said addressing them both, "the reply ought to be here by then, if favourable we can start to-morrow. Please understand, Dunbar and self

must decline to be seen travelling with you. I hope you have plenty of proper clothes, and what is almost more important that you will know when and how to wear them." He took up his hat and gloves. "As to terms, those we will arrange but I shall require a preliminary £50 this afternoon to buy some collars and ties."

"And your friend Mr. —"

"Dunbar, Dallas Dunbar," supplemented Browne.

"Will he want to be in the game?" asked Morrison.

"Naturally, but I shall arrange all that. You must know they are his friends and only acquaintances of mine, and now good-bye for the present. Don't trouble to come down," and not waiting for any reply Cave-Browne opened the door and he and his imperturbable manner and undisturbed smile disappeared down the dark and narrow stair-case.

Left together the Baron and Morrison looked at each other.

"He *is* an insolent swine," the latter remarked savagely. "This is not the first time he's been on the job."

"Never mind," the former answered, going across to the decanter, "he will get us out of our hole."

"And if he can, if the wire is all right, how can we start?" cried Morrison. "Have you thought of that, my dear Baron, or are you like that beast who says he never thinks?" Morrison's florid face was almost pale, his hands moved restlessly, his feet keeping time to them.

"Ah!" ejaculated Von Kensig thoughtfully, "I had indeed forgotten. How cruel is fate, how cruel." He swallowed his brandy with an air of rueful meditation, his companion watching him with ill-concealed impatience.

"Do put that infernal glass down," he exclaimed, "and bring your wits to bear on where in the name of hell or heaven is the money to be found. For the sake of a beggarly £100 or so we shall probably lose this chance of thousands, the bare possibility is enough to make one feel that one is on the high road to a mad house." He threw himself into a chair.

Just as Von Kensig was about to make some reply, whether appropriate, comforting, or the reverse will never be known, there was a knock at the door, while a voice with a distinct accent inquired from the other side,

"May I come in?"

"Why, it's Rocky!" they both exclaimed together in tones of pleased relief, and Von Kensig went forward to open the door, while Morrison with lightning agility hid the box of Corona Coronas.

"Well, boys, and how are you?" was the stranger's greeting. The humour of this form of address did not appear to strike any of the three.

Henry Rawlings, commonly called Rocky from the fact that if anyone was indiscreet enough to enquire how he felt before noon invariably replied, "Rocky, very Rocky," was a man of over fifty. An American by birth, he found the climate of London more bracing than that of New York,

and therefore made his permanent home not a hundred miles from Westminster Abbey. Tall and well-set up—his corsets were French and expensive—he had a haddock coloured face, well trimmed blonde moustache, and lips that receded over his false teeth and caused him to bark out his words instead of speaking them, which combined with his intonation frequently rendered him quite unintelligible.

Now this man's position was a curious one. Supported for many years past by Morrison Salutaris, he was the man whose duty it was to rope in victims, and this under the guise of apparently aggressive, respectability he did, picking up people anywhere—in the street, in bars, in the halls of hotels. His address and conversation were both too uninteresting to arouse any doubts, while his offices in the Strand furnished with a typewriter, two telephones and a safe served two purposes, that of disarming any possible suspicion and of being the happy hunting place of many a member of "the profession."

If it takes all kinds of people to make a world it takes every kind of person to ensure the success of the life of such men as these.

Rocky was one of the decoy ducks. I am aware in books touching on this subject that it is women who are always portrayed as filling that ambiguous and highly uncomfortable position; nothing could be more erroneous. Card sharps, lacking though they be in much, are well aware of the danger of women in such enterprises as they

engage in. The devil—whose dislike for holy water is well known—does not dread that innocuous fluid more than “profession” does the presence of a woman at their games. So far do they carry this feeling that they will avoid “taking on,” to use their own expression, a man who is travelling with his wife.

“Wal boys, and how are you?” repeated Rocky as he deposited his tall hat on a chair, and sat himself most carefully down. Alas! he was always in dread—a dread fully shared by the on looker—that some part of him might crack if not treated with caution.

“We are in a hideous hole,” replied Morrison, and then he proceeded to unfold his woes.

Rocky having glanced round in vain for a cigar with a resigned sigh drew his pipe and tobacco pouch from his pocket, knocked the former sharply twice against the wall, an action that caused Morrison to start in a most guilty fashion. Rocky listened to the end without comment, pushing the tobacco lavishly with bony fingers into the pipe.

He asked the Baron for a match, lit up, and then stretched his long legs out.

When Morrison had finished and Von Kensig had added a few words Rocky was still silent, sucking at the amber mouth-piece in a truly irritating way. Suddenly he said rapidly and yet with his indescribably unique intonation to which it is forever impossible to do justice.

“Wal, there is only one thing that can be done. Mind you, Morrison, I don’t say that it can—”

"For mercy's sake try, whatever it is!" exclaimed Morrison and his voice was indeed tinged with despair.

"Wal," continued Rawlings, "there's a man whom I once did a good turn to, he's got money now and likes to lend it at three hundred per cent. Perhaps—mind Morrison I don't say it's likely—he might put up the expenses. Anyway I'll go and see him. He's a sweep and a blood sucker but he's got the stiff."

"Tear it off him by force if you can't get it any other way," said Morrison.

"Will you have a brandy?" asked Von Kensig seeing Rocky's eye wandering longingly in its direction.

"My dear Baron, if Rocky is to go out on important business it is quite impossible for him to do it if he stinks of spirits," exclaimed Morrison in his tartest tones, to which Rocky meekly acquiesced, adding valiantly:

"I can assure you, Morrison, I've been on the water wagon for two days, why I don't even keep a bottle of whiskey in my rooms. What the hell's one bottle of whiskey if you are damned miserable?"

"It's a filthy and disgusting habit and you are evidently about to fall from that wagon," and Morrison's mouth pursed itself up till it resembled nothing so much as the Pope's nose on a well roasted spring duckling. "But we waste our time. If this man of yours won't find the ready, what then?"

Rocky removed his pipe and replied, "I have another friend, he's a receiver of stolen jewellery—at least not really stolen you know."

"Of course not," snapped Morrison.

"Well, if you'd take jewellery instead of money perhaps it might be managed. We could pawn it for something anyhow."

"Take, we'll take anything. You know that perfectly well, and now you'd better go, Rocky, I'm tired."

Rawlings rose obediently.

"What chances of success do you think you have when money seems as tight as the bark of a tree? What argument can you use to make them part without security? Not even the wire from Brussels," enquired Von Kensig anxiously.

"Leave it to me, boys, leave it to me," was the reply, and again the humour of that form of address did not seem to strike any of the three.

CHAPTER VI

At five o'clock the telephone rang in that jumping insistent way that it has. Morrison alone and trembling with anxiety went to the receiver. Rocky's voice which to a stranger would have seemed more unintelligible than ever sounded over the wire.

"Is that you, Morrison?" he drawled.

"Yes; well?"

"I am with my friend now. He says that if you have anything to show that you have legitimate business in Brussels he will let you have some jewellery, not money you understand. Has the wire to Cave-Browne come?"

"No," Morris answered with a miserable mental groan, "it may be here any time. Ask him to wait for half an hour."

"All right, I'll ring you up from the office if you don't ring me."

"All right, good-bye," and Morrison rang off and went back to his seat by the low burning fire and his melancholy meditations. Von Kensig had gone over to the bar at a neighbouring restaurant to see if he could not find

a mug from the country and so be enabled to rattle the dice box to advantage. Salutaris's man, the inimitable Dealton, had been dispatched to borrow a few shillings from his uncle—a valet to a wealthy nobleman who lived in Piccadilly, while the matchless Morrison beat an impatient tattoo with his beautiful boot on the fender rail and reflected on the monstrous injustice of things in general and his own pathetic position in particular.

At twenty past five Cave-Browne arrived. He held an open telegram in his hand. He handed it to Morrison who read it eagerly, it ran :

"Delighted to see you. Cross if possible to-morrow. The races are on here and worth seeing. Kindest regards."

Morrison read it twice and the puckers in his fat, florid face began to disappear somewhat.

"What luck," he said in a relieved tone. "I mean how very nice," he corrected himself. "Shall we go to-night?" he asked.

"No," replied Cave-Browne. "Dunbar and I will go to-night, you and Von Kensig can follow in the morning."

Morrison shifted uneasily.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "neither the Baron or I care for travelling in the day time, it attracts so much unnecessary attention," hearing which Cave-Browne smiled.

"What an extraordinary notion," he exclaimed, "but, of course, as you like. Let us go to-night by all means. We can cross by different routes."

Morrison was silent, revolving many uncomfortable

problems. To get the jewellery he must have the telegram in his possession, and in order to start he must do both. He glanced impatiently at the clock: time was ticking away. The visitor caught the look, nothing indeed ever escaped him.

"I must be off," he said, "you may as well give me a cheque for that £50, I shall want it," he took up the wire as he spoke. "With regard to the rest, all my expenses and his and one half of the game."

"Of course, of course," assented Morrison.

"Then that settled, now write out a cheque like a good fellow."

"The fact is, Browne, I can't do that till Von Kensig returns. I am most awfully sorry I—"

"It is of no consequence, it simply means that we go to-morrow, that's all," the other spoke with complete indifference.

Just then the telephone rang.

"May I have that wire to show Von Kensig?" Morrison asked.

"Yes," answered Browne tossing it across the table unsuspiciously. "I shall come back in the morning," and then he went.

Morrison rushed to the telephone and screamed to Rocky to jump into a hansom and come along quicker than at once, and then sank into a chair to await his arrival in a state of sheer exhaustion. One hour later a case of jewellery was handed to Morrison in exchange for his and

Von Kensig's joint bill at three months for £300, whereupon the faithful Rocky was dispatched to dispose of it with a friendly relative to the very best and utmost of his ability, Rocky had a rare talent for extracting the extreme limit from pawnbrokers, more especially unregistered ones. He was further enjoined to bring back some refreshments; German sausages and Lager beer for the Baron, pate de foie sandwiches and champagne for Morrison. It was then just a quarter to seven o'clock. The fog had cleared off but the rain was descending in torrents, as Rocky gingerly made his way under a dripping umbrella down a narrow funnel-like passage running at right angles between Regent Street and Beak Street.

Presently he stopped at a small house where only one light showed on the first floor and rang the bell, the door rolled back by itself and he groped his way up a short flight of stairs and entered, evidently with the air of one who knew he was welcome. In the room where the light was, seated at a desk, just within the circle of the lamp, was one of the most unsavoury little Jews that it is possible to imagine, whose unkempt gray hair grew like a dingy aureole round his yellow face and beady eyes. He rose to greet Rocky, rubbing his hands together and with a hideous attempt at a smile.

"Vell, vell, it is long since you come to see me, Mr. Rawlings. Sit you down, you are very velcome, very velcome."

Rocky deposited his umbrella in the corner of the room, not without intention, as he well knew how the sight of the pool of water gathering on the faded carpet would wring the genial old Hebrew gentleman's generous heart, then he seated himself at the table and pushing some papers aside deposited his parcel saying :

"Well, Madix, how's business?"

"Shocking, shocking, Mr. Rawlings, no monish anywere in the Vest End of London." He spread out his claw-like hands eloquently.

"That's bad, that's bad," barked Rocky impatient to get through with his affair.

"You got something for me?" Madix's gaze glued itself on the case.

"Yes," Rocky answered, "I want you to let me have all you can at once," he pushed the box toward Madix.

"At vonce, that is very quick, Mr. Rawlings," he murmured as he drew a diamond pendant, three rings that shone like lumps of brilliant beauty, two scarf pins, and fell to examining them with a critical eye while Rocky abstractedly regarded the jaundice like wall paper that hung in many places in strips.

"Vot you vant?" asked Madix replacing the pendant and looking up at Rocky.

"Three hundred pounds, and don't haggle, Madix, because I'm in a hurry."

"My Gott! old man, you 'ave gone mad!" cried the

Jew in unmitigated and truly pious horror. "Diamonds is a drug in the market, they are giving them away."

"Where? only tell me where, and I'll drive off there at once!" exclaimed Rocky.

"Are you pleased to joke with me, Mr. Rawlings?" and Madix emitted a liverish cackle, which he was wont to designate as a laugh.

"I have no time for jokes, Madix." Rocky was growing irritable. "What are you prepared to do?"

"I vill give £150, not von penny more, so much only because I have a great regard for you, Mr. Rawlings, and then our relationship is—"

"Never mind our relationship, you're a damned old robber, Madix, you know that as well as I. Still, hand over the money and let me go."

Rocky rose to his feet. He was well aware how useless it would be to bargain. He knew his man. Mr. Madix hobbled over in his carpet slippers to his safe, where, first locking the jewels away, he then took a roll of notes, and counting out with regretful greed the necessary amount, gave it to Rocky, saying as he did so,

"I am giving too much, too much. I shall never be a rich man. I let my heart run away vith me, always my heart speaks."

"The devil is the only thing that will ever run away with you, Madix, don't you be afraid," Rocky said, as he put the notes carefully away in his breast pocket. The old Jew rubbed his hands.

"You vill have your joke," he said.

"Well, good-night, and sleep well ; you are a philanthropic soul," exclaimed Rocky, as he took his way downstairs and out into the street.

It was a significant fact that no form of receipt passed between those two. Mr. Madix went back into his room, looked at his Waterbury watch, and then began to put on a muddy pair of boots. Once or twice it seemed as if he chuckled as he did so, but possibly it was only the gnawing noise of rats in the wainscoting.

CHAPTER VII

"Well, boys," said Rocky, when he reached the flat, and was relieved of his parcels by Dealton looking at Von Kensig and Morrison, "I've had a terrible time bargaining, bargaining. I declare, Morrison, it's a cheap jack's game, not the pursuit of a gentleman," he drew off his wet gloves and loosened his coat, "and at last I got the old thief to give £125, the very best that I could do."

Morrison's face clouded like a sullen sunset as he echoed in dismay, "Only £125!"

But the Baron's thoughts were fixed on the tray that was just making its appearance. Dealton deposited their refreshments on the table and withdrew, carefully leaving the door slightly ajar so that he might not lose any salient points in the family council.

However, even Morrison's expression softened at the sight of pate de foie and amber wine sufficiently for him to remark indulgently, as he seated himself at the table, "I suppose it can't be helped, but you are losing your talent, Rocky.

It is a beggarly sum, and will hardly see us through. There's £50 to Cave-Browne right off, confound him!"

"That's a pity," barked Rocky, "because I was going to ask you for a tenner for my trouble. I'm beastly hard up, as you know."

"So we all are," Morrison replied. "However, you shall have your tenner when we get to Brussels. Meanwhile, have a drink and a Corona Corona," he added graciously.

* * * * *

"I don't like it, frankly I don't," protested Dallas Dunbar that night.

"My dear boy, you always say that, and you always do it in the end," Cave-Browne retorted, throwing the end of a half-finished cigar into the fire, by which they were making a late sitting.

"Yes, I know I'm a mean hound," the young man said miserably.

"I can't say I like your vocabulary," the elder man replied.

Dallas Dunbar was silent.

"Of course, if you don't wish to take it on, we'll say no more about it," Browne continued, with a fine assumption of indifference.

"You know I have no choice but to do so," was the reply.

Cave-Browne and Dallas, on their arrival in Brussels, drove straight from the station to the best hotel, and having installed themselves in comfortable quarters,

Dunbar sent a few lines to the house of his friends, Gustav and Henri Carlier, to announce his and his friends' arrival.

After a change of dress Dallas went for a long walk returning to the hotel for a late luncheon, and finding a cordial note from the Carliers, begging that both would stay at their house while in Brussels, but in any case to dine with them that night. The latter part of the invitation they accepted while declining the first, feeling that, though prepared to take the plunge from decency to disgrace, anything that had to be done should happen on neutral ground. Curiously enough, most men of his class when entering "profession," try to comfort themselves with casuistry of this feeble nature.

While Cave-Browne was dressing for dinner, Morrison and the Baron knocked at his door and walked in.

"Have they been to see you yet?" asked Salutaris, vainly trying to appear indifferent.

Taking no notice of the question, "Allow me to tell you," Cave-Browne said in icy tones, "that if you wish me to bring you in contact with your superiors you must mend your manners. Leave my rooms at once! If you want to see me, send to know if it is convenient. You—you don't suppose I am going to stand being obviously connected with you, do you?"

Morrison changed colour more than once, while sick with an anger he had too mean a soul to give expression to.

"Mr. Cave-Browne," broke in the Baron hurriedly, always anxious to make peace, "you must blame me, Morrison wished to make a formal call, only I am too impetuous, and it being business, persuaded him to come straight in. Nobody saw us."

"There is no more to be said, Baron," Cave-Browne replied, with a strong effort to make his manner conciliatory, "we are indeed all together in this affair, and in any case, I must not forget that I, at least, am the guest of yourself and Mr. Salutaris."

With this he rang the bell, he ordered bottles of brandy, whiskey, liqueurs, and minerals, to avoid interruptions from servants, asked them to fill their glasses.

"We dine with the Carliers at their house to-night," said Cave-Browne handing them the invitation, "and as you see we can form no idea of how they propose to spend the evening. The sooner you both make their acquaintance the better. How would you suggest it being done, Salutaris."

Somewhat modified at this appeal to his capacity as an organiser he replied, "The Baron is staying at another hotel but I have rooms here and he is dining with me to-night, after dinner we will remain in my sitting-room. I would suggest that you bring your friends to your rooms for a night-cap, where you will find my card with the number of my room asking you to come and have a drink with me. You can then send to invite me to bring the Baron and introduce him. Afterwards we can have a little game."

I say," interrupted Cave-Browne, "isn't that rushing things a bit?"

"I don't mean business of course," said Morrison, and you, my dear Baron, must refrain from performing miracles. Let one of them win about what the other loses, and you, Browne or Dunbar, must lose about £125 to Von Kensig and myself. The Baron will say he is dead tired and must go to bed early, and I will then break up the game and ask yourself and the two Carliers to dine with me and take your revenge the first night you are all disengaged."

"Right you are," said Cave-Browne. "Try to be in by 10.30 and somehow or other I will do my part. Now I must be going!" and lighting a cigarette from a box that Morrison had given him for business purposes he went off to his dinner.

Dunbar, Browne, and the Carliers had travelled a good deal together in Holland, and both brothers had nothing but the most cordial feeling for the good-looking Englishmen. The four dined alone and afterwards Morrison's programme was easily carried out.

Arrived in his own rooms Browne duly found Morrison's card.

"Do you fellows know Morrison Salutaris?" he asked. "No! well, he is stopping here, not a bad fellow, though he does walk like the French tarts on the wrong side of Regent Street. You must let me bring him in and introduce him to you three. His father has a particularly nice appointment in London, a sinecure for an old soldier."

To which suggestion the courteous Hollanders bowed an assent and Cave-Browne went for the Baron and Salutaris.

The game was carried out so precisely as planned that Cave-Browne thought it almost a waste of time to play instead of telling the brothers the inevitable result.

Dallas Dunbar declined to play.

In due course the Baron and Morrison left, the latter having arranged for all the party to dine with him the next night.

As he went out the Baron gave a very German bow, flicking his handkerchief rather as his countrymen flourish a napkin and put his card on Cave-Browne's table: "Baron Rudolph von Kensig, Hanover." Gustav Carlier saying, "Excuse me," picked up the card and looked at it.

"A pretty wide address," he said, "why a man might almost as well put "London Upstairs."

A few minutes later they all parted for the night.

Almost before the hotel door had closed on the Carliers the Baron knocked at Cave-Browne's door.

"Do you think it is alright?" he asked with a look so wistful that even Dunbar could only laugh as Browne answered.

"My good Baron, I am sure it will be absolutely all wrong if we start playing jack-in-the-box. Either come in, shut the door and have a drink, or let us say good-night before the night watchman thinks we are going to make a raid."

The Baron looked quite dignified as he drew himself up

to his full height saying, "I never dream of such things nowadays." Then quickly correcting himself said, "You are right, perhaps we had better say good-night."

The dinner the next night was well and carefully ordered; the wines those best calculated to make all hands grow rapidly *forrader*. Salutaris and the Baron, though their glasses were kept continually filled were moderate in their potations. The Carliers did themselves remarkably well. Dallas Dunbar and they found much to discuss. They drank glass after glass of very dry champagne until Morrison motioned to Dealton that he was filling the wrong glass too frequently.

Coffee, liqueurs, the best of cigarettes and cigars made their appearance while Dealton prepared the card table. He placed two smaller tables at a convenient distance so that each man could help himself to spirits and mineral waters without interrupting the game.

"Come on," exclaimed Browne, "let us make a start, I want to win back my 'pony.'"

The Carliers were willing. "Gallery E'carte" was the game chosen. At first luck favoured Browne. He speedily won about £100 while the Carliers and Morrison were a few pounds ahead. The Baron was the only loser.

"My luck seems bad," he remarked, "but I should like to give it a run if you fellows will let me. May I take the 'Chouette?'" This being agreed the Baron took the bank against the room, each man playing until he lost a game, the Baron accepting all bets.

With the Chouette Von Kensig speedily regained his losses. Betting now became much higher. When the Baron had won three games in succession it became the turn of Henri Carlier to play him.

"May I have ten thousand francs on this game, Baron?" he asked.

"Yes, with pleasure."

Gustav Carlier bet the same amount.

The Baron won this game and the three following, the wagers growing higher. Henri Carlier played a fine game. He backed himself heavily and at times reduced the Baron's winnings materially. Dallas Dunbar moved with flushed face and dancing eyes.

During the sixth game in the Baron's winning run, Carlier made one of those errors of judgment that the very best players occasionally fall into. He lost the game and with it the command of his temper.

"Baron," he said, "pardon me if I think I am a better player than you even after my stupid mistake. If you consent and the others do not mind I would like to make this a duel of thirty games for a fixed sum a game."

"Certainly I will play you thirty games for any stakes you like, but I should think twenty would be a better test."

"As you like," agreed Carlier, "let it be twenty games. Shall we say fifteen thousand francs a game?"

"By all means," replied Von Kensig having received an affirmative signal from Morrison and Browne.

"Will you go me halves?" Henri Carlier asked of his brother.

"Yes. But if we lose heavily I shall be unable to pay in less than a week. Will that be agreeable to you, Baron?"

"Perfectly. Indeed if my losses are more than two thousand pounds I shall have to ask you to wait four days for me to settle."

Von Kensig's truest words for many days.

Twenty counters were placed on the table each representing one game. Von Kensig had annexed eleven of them and Carlier had two to his credit when the latter said :

"I should like to bet fifty thousand francs extra on this game."

The Baron was busy shuffling the cards, "singing" as it is called in the "profession," counting the cards as he prepared himself a winning hand.

"Certainly," he replied.

Then as he dealt and turned the trump he remarked quite mechanically :

"Le Roi."

Alas ! even the greatest artists fail sometimes.

The king was with Carlier who scored the vole and followed on by winning the game, thus reducing his losses by sixty-five thousand francs.

The last six games were won by Von Kensig.

It was a bad reckoning for the brothers who left comparatively early, saying they would pay £2000 in the

morning and the balance of their losses in a week. After expressing their astonishment at the Baron's marvellous run they left. Morrison, then turned on the Baron with a savage snarl.

"Why in God's name," he asked, "need you slip up on that game instead of letting him win some other? A clear two thousand six hundred pounds out of our pockets!"

"Oh, go to hell," was the reply, "why don't you learn to work yourself before you criticise. You are only the fifth wheel to the coach and I have a good mind to work alone with Browne and our shy friend here who certainly is not stuck on you."

"My dear Baron," answered Salutaris, "you must, I think, remember how long we have worked together," and with a more truculent air he added, "and of how far too much we know of each other." With these words he stretched out a rather flabby right hand to the Baron who waved his acceptance of the apology, and late or early as the hour was, business now being over, they locked all the doors, their enforced abstinence being compensated for by an attack, with many repetitions, upon various flasks of creme de menthe—that sickly drink dearer than all others to the hearts or rather palates of the "profession."

Then they broke up. Browne was the first to be wakened. Pounding on the door with a broom was a stalwart housemaid intent upon doing her duty.

He kept her at bay, while in spite of a throbbing head he picked up all the cards, putting them carefully away, not being certain of Von Kensig's methods and not wishing to obtrude any needless evidence upon the notice of the curious.

Under the soothing influence of a drink and a very hot bath he complacently arranged his immediate future and wondered which of his or Dunbar's acquaintances would next have to fall to Von Kensig's bow and spear.

* * * * *

The Carliers kept their word, bringing to Morrison's room fifty thousand francs and a large black portfolio of securities. These they did not hand over, saying they desired a few days to realise at good prices.

Before leaving Gustave Carlier said, "There is one thing, gentlemen, that my brother and I ask you, that is that you never mention this affair under any circumstances."

The Baron and Morrison solemnly and thankfully agreed to this request.

"That shall be as you wish, gentlemen," said the Baron in his most ingratiating manner, "unfortunately I have important business that takes me to England to-night, and possibly to Austria for a few days, but I want you to promise to come to London as my guests this day fortnight so that I may give you your revenge."

Gustave Carlier, looking very tall and cold, replied, "My brother and I are going to pay you, Baron Von Kensig, because gentlemen always pay. I enquired at the

Austrian Embassy about you to-day, so you may not be surprised to hear that I would not play *ecarte* or any other game with you if you allowed me to stake one shilling against your one hundred pounds." Then they both took their departure.

When the door closed on the Carliers, Morrison with a futile effort to throw a chest exclaimed in the mincing tones natural to him when really upset, "What can the impudent beast have meant?" he demanded.

"Oh nothing," replied Browne, "except that if a future meeting takes place he will rightly cut me, break your damned fat neck and er—er—the Baron—well if he saw him talking to anyone he knew he would probably pull his nose, or if he was alone would request him to clear out of the place so long as he himself remained there."

Dallas was not present at this interview.

After a minute's thought Morrison divided the ready money left by the Carliers after deducting all expenses up to date, saying, "As you know your men, Browne, will you be good enough to decide what we had each better do?"

"Right," replied Browne. "The Baron has declared his intention of going to London, the sooner he starts the better. Dallas must at once call at the Embassy as the Ambassador is his cousin. If he does not ask him to dinner we must invite ourselves and see that the fact of our being there is properly recorded. Why don't you come there with me, Morrison?"

At this suggestion the Baron's lantern jaws expanded

into a hideous grin which made his mouth look like the entrance to a mine of refined gold. He began a raucous ill suppressed chuckle, which however died suddenly as he caught the absolutely murderous glance bestowed by Morrison on Browne before he replied :

"In London the Baron wisely remarked that as we were all rowing in the same boat, it would be silly for anyone of us to pull out the plug while we are still so far from land. I will not assume that you meant to insult me as at the present time you do not know how many things sound like insults to us who are down and out."

"At present." These words struck painfully on even Cave-Browne's ear.

"I assure you, Morrison," he said, "I meant nothing offensive and really do not know how I have annoyed you."

"You may just as well understand several things," said Morrison. "Sooner or later when men adopt this way of making a living they get blown upon and their Embassies—indeed quite humble establishments of their fellow countrymen—are the places they take care to avoid when travelling. I am in this category, though I am swine enough to affect a semblance of respectability by having my letters to London addressed to my father's house, and staying there when the pavement is up everywhere else, especially if he is away."

"Get on well with your governor?" asked Browne casually, glad to find his boats out of the firing zone for once.

"Get on with my governor," was the reply. Salutaris rolled up his eyes which for once had expression, even if only that of being the weather guage of the bile his tortured liver had collected after the debauch of the previous night. "Upon my soul," he continued, "I really never can make up my mind which I detest the most, my father or my mother."

Browne laughed. "I was spared the boredom of a lengthy acquaintance with mine," he said.

"And where may I ask does the Baron find his place in this social constellation?"

Morrison grinned as he answered, "Von Kensig is a great noble in most countries, but when in Hanover so extraordinary is his modesty that he invariably travels incognito. However let us settle our plans. I hope that this will only be the first of many coups we are to pull off together with you and Dunbar. As I cannot come with you to the Embassy, I had better get back to London and find suitable quarters where we can have a little game from time to time?"

"Yes, that seems a good idea. I will see something of the Carliers. At present they can only suspect, even if that, and after all I only won about £100. I have more than once lost that much to them," said Browne.

"My dear fellow," replied Morrison, "you deserve the Victoria Cross if you remain. When I have killed a 'mug' I never wish to see him or hear of him again." A sentiment which the Baron fully endorsed.

"Now that seems illogical to me," mused Browne. "I have always loved people who have lost even small sums to me, they have contributed to my comfort. I now feel inclined to adore the Carliers.

"That is all right when it is simply a gamble and on the dead level," broke in the Baron.

"My dear Baron, what *can* you know about that?" sighed Morrison.

"This I do know," interjected the Baron, "no mug ever falls twice to the same combination. And that," continued Salutaris, "is the worst phase of the business, one has to be forever on the look out for new material."

"Such as it is let us do the best we can as quickly as possible and get out of it," said Browne. "It must be like a mine which should be worked day and night, and gutted quickly. The administration expense is practically the same for six hours per day as for twenty-four and the swifter you work out your pay streak the better."

"Unfortunately hardly one man in fifty quits when he can afford it," said Morrison, "then when he is broke he finds himself too strong to work at anything legitimate."

"How sentimental you grow Morrison," exclaimed the Baron, "the main point to be settled, however, is where you are going in London," interposed Browne. "Naturally I shall return to my quarters in Little Stanhope Street; do you go to Shaftesbury Avenue again?"

"Good heavens! no," replied Morrison, "I have heard

of a maisonette in Hay Hill which we can have for six weeks for £250, not really so very much more than we are now paying. Instead of being robbed in a pig sty because the beastly landlord knows our strength, we should be in a beautiful place surrounded by the charming conviction of china and pictures."

"But the price seems preposterous," exclaimed Browne who had inherited some simple instincts, "what on earth can you be paying now? My rooms in town are really not bad, and only up two flights, consisting of two sitting-rooms, good bedroom, &c., which only runs me about £6 a week."

"All I can tell you is," exclaimed Morrison, "that for the two miserable so-called flats the Baron and I occupy, each having one bedroom, one sitting-room and a bath-room usually out of gear, we pay £12 a week. Our joint bill for a filthy breakfast, minerals, and the keep of our two men is seldom a penny under £25, and not even any credit. We shall certainly not return. The Carliers will pay the money to the Baron's credit in his London bank, so he and I will go to a hotel till it arrives, or till we settle upon an abode. Our letters and telegrams will always be forwarded to us if addressed to Ravenscourt Mansions, West Kensington, where we have a friend who attends to all our correspondence in our absence."

"That plan may suit you alright, but I will wait till you are settled before I communicate. I believe in that wise axiom of Talleyrand's, 'Live with your friends re-

membering always that they will one day be your enemies,' I shall come in a few days to London, so please notify me where I am to find you. Shall you leave to-day, Salutaris?"

"Yes; I shall hire an automobile and drive myself down to the coast for a breath of fresh air by the sad sea waves. You know how romantic I really am and how perfectly the sea responds to my moods."

"I have seen you on board ship," the Baron responded with suggestive significance, whereupon Salutaris sniffed audibly and the conversation ran with unaccountable swiftness back into other channels.

On the morrow, Morrison, after a cordial-leave taking, departed in an imposing yellow car.

"Verily the god in the car," as Browne remarked to Dallas.

Just before starting, when Morrison was very red and moist from wrestling with the machinery, the Baron exclaimed,

"Where is Dealton, my dear Morrison?"

"Dealton has been most insolent," answered Salutaris, his nose going skyward. "Of course he did not mean to be. If it was not such a horrid bore I would dismiss the fellow."

"What's he done?" asked Browne.

"He did nothing," said Dealton's master testily, tugging away at his gloves, "only when I told him that I was going to drive the car he asked if he might go by train and pay his own fare. I suppose he thought the train would be faster."

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Cave-Browne smiled and stared into vacancy while Salutaris tried to start the motor.

"What *could* he have meant, Morrison," asked Von Kensig wonderingly.

Salutaris jammed his cap down over his eyes, climbed with offended dignity into the automobile and with one last frantic effort set it going.

A week later the Carliers settled, and to give him his due, the Baron promptly drew Browne and Dallas' share and took it to them, thus at least establishing his reputation for promptness and honesty, and that with no lurking idea of favours to come behind it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Cumberland had a large party as usual at Cumberland Abbey for Christmas and the New Year, and those gathered there were Lady Henry and Helen.

The Abbey was a stately place, built in the early part of the latter half of the seventeenth century, and bearing the impress of that period in its fine spaciousness and great terraces on which white peacocks strolled. An immense stretching park with old oak and beechen trees and bracken, where the deer were a delight to the eye, surrounded the house on every side and shut out forever any outer world.

Christmas there was carried out on the old feudal order. The estate was a very large one, and most of the servants had lived there from generation to generation and in a few cases from century to century. Here indeed was Lady Cumberland queen regnant.

It was Christmas eve when the Wyvernes arrived—not a snowy, old-fashioned Christmas with all accessories in good working order, but bitterly cold and wet. Without, the

lamps of the carriage that had brought them from the station were almost obscured by the amount of mud that they had come through. The high wind sobbed and sighed in the great trees. The transition from the almost black darkness without to the glow and light and warmth of the vast hall within with its trophies of the chase and its enormous log burning under great andirons was almost dazzling.

The servants led the way to the big panelled library where Lady Cumberland usually had tea. It was a room panelled with oak and beautified by a monumental mantelpiece of coloured marble which a former member of the house had brought from Florence.

Here was Jane Cumberland seated in her favourite high-backed chair by the tea table around her were grouped half-a-dozen guests, amongst them Lord Glencare, Lady Henry and Helen were greeted with friendly effusion by the hostess. Lady Henry took a chair by Lady Cumberland and threw back her fur. Helen was claimed by two girls who were seated together.

It was a picturesque scene and a very English one on which the blue flames from the fire danced and the soft light of candles shed a lustre.

A low, heavily timbered room with deep-set windows, oak furniture, upholstered in iris coloured velvet and dark tapestries which threw into a fine relief the winter roses set in profusion in gilt Burmese bowls, on the backs of the books in their high cases, and on the great black

and gold shields hanging against the blackened walls; on the gay and charming group of men who had talked the butterfly subjects of the hour, while drinking tea from Crown Derby cups, shut in quaint holders of beaten silver. They were all handsome people and all healthy people.

"I was so agreeably surprised to welcome my nephew," Lady Cumberland remarked to Lady Henry under the cover of the general hum that was going forward.

"It *was* a surprise of course."

"Yes, he only returned from Turkey the other night."

"Has he quite recovered from his accident?" The speaker could not help the slight sneer that crept into her voice; personally she had never for one instant credited that excuse.

"O quite, my child, why that was last August, don't you remember."

"Oh, yes! I remember quite well," said Lady Henry as she stirred her tea.

"He has had a most delightful time," pursued the old lady, "and personally I think looks all the better for that touch of golden tan," she looked affectionately across to where her nephew sat talking to a young woman in black velvet and sables.

"He certainly looks well," conceded her guest, adding, "I always think that people who can have plenty of variety of scene invariably do, it's the dead dull monotony of the same place that so often undermines one health and kills one's looks.

"I daresay, I daresay," agreed Lady Cumberland, her thoughts evidently still wandering towards Glencare.

"He tells me," she continued, "that the Sultan of Turkey, whose guest he was, is the only man who really knows how to live."

"Really," murmured Lady Henry faintly. She was really rather shocked.

Lady Cumberland smiled.

"Rather opposed to our insular ideas of that monarch, but I should not be surprised if Ulric is quite right."

"Oh, I daresay." This came rather doubtfully. "It is more than possible that those Turks have very finished ideas about life," Lady Cumberland said, opening and closing her pince nez.

"I hope for your sake your nephew is not contemplating becoming one," suggested Lady Henry with a certain degree of polite concern.

"I certainly trust that he will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed his aunt, "because then I should never see him."

"No," her friend assented vaguely, "I believe they will not allow women into the harem."

The elder woman laughed.

"Really, Alicia, your occasional lapses are the most convincing things I know," she declared.

"I am so glad you are amused," was the reply.

Shortly afterwards there was a general exodus to dress for dinner. At half past eight the entire house-party of

twenty-four sat down to a meal that from the quantity of gold plate, hot-house flowers and footmen in powder might have been almost described as a banquet. A small private orchestra in a most delicate and agreeable fashion supplied the only thing lacking to perfect enjoyment.

Lady Henry Wyverne was escorted by a local magnate who, boring her extremely, was therefore the means of giving her much opportunity for observation. Lord Glencare was host, and the woman to whom he had devoted his languid attentions in the library sat on his left. She was the only person present not personally known to Lady Wyverne. She felt sorry that she had not asked Jane Cumberland who she was.

The lady in question was very young, or appeared so, in evening dress. She wore grey muslin, inset with sable and Maltese lace, her only ornament being an old-fashioned ring glove of lovely stones worn on the right hand.

The hostess herself was an imposing figure and was holding animated converse with an old gentleman on her right.

She could just see Helen through the interspaces of the flowers, Helen dazzling that night in pale apricot satin with amber and diamond earrings. Her mother sighed to think that her partner should be that supercilious guardsman, Austen Burnside, whose affectations and debts were alike prodigious. The rest, pretty women with a fair sprinkling of equally good-looking men, did not hold her attention for any appreciable length of time, she had seen

them all too often under various circumstances and costumes—in the park, at the opera, at Ranelagh.

The conversation, incessant as it was, neither scintillated with wit nor surprised by wisdom, being the ordinary converse of people who, having been born with a whole plate chest in their mouths—find life usually either a bore or a comedy—but right seldom allow it to degenerate into a tragedy.

When dinner was over there were cards and some vocal music, in which latter the fair unknown took part, singing with convincing grace and in a very fair voice the somewhat startling "*Avez vous vu dans Barcelona*," which evoked rounds of applause.

"Who is she?" enquired Lady Henry when talk became general again.

"She is a very delightful friend, whose acquaintance I made at the Bathursts some few weeks ago." Lady Cumberland told her. "I took a great fancy to her. She is an Italian by birth and the widow of the Marquis St. Clair."

"And quite enough too," was the listener's mental comment. Aloud, however, she said, "She is very good-looking."

Lady Cumberland raised her pince nez and looked across to where the lady in question stood by the grand piano. "Extremely so," she agreed, "but not to be compared to Helen."

The next morning the sun shone on a world of snow. Most of the guests attended service in the ivy decorated Parish Church with its Norman font and high enclosed pews, listening with well-bred patience to the vicar's long drawn out discourse on everything connected with the season, from the birth of our Lord to the last takings of the poor box.

It was a sermon that he had preached regularly for the past thirty-three years and never failed to evoke much coughing and shuffling of feet on the part of the congregation.

There was an informal and most enjoyable luncheon at the Abbey, with sleighing and tobogganning in the snow for the younger members of the party—a pastime at which Lord Glencare was an adept and took upon himself to initiate Helen Wyverne into its wild delights. But afterwards left her for the society of Madame St. Clair.

Helen was possibly at her best in the open with nature, either in its summer or winter glory. For her there could be no better setting.

The Christmas dinner party was the same as the night before with the addition of the vicar and his wife, a poor faded woman, whose yearly dissipation it was, and whose dress looked as if it had been made by the village carpenter.

The vicar escorted Lady Cumberland, and in the intervals of eating told her all the parish affairs from the spasms of

Mrs. Giles, the blacksmith's wife, to the last arrival in the verger's family.

Lord Glencare, on his part, bore with exquisite and admirable meekness the conversational efforts of Mrs. Vicar, wondering idly, as she meandered on about the last bazaar, if women so positively criminally unattractive should take the trouble of going on living.

The lady, on her part, considered him delightful, and felt sure inwardly that he was very wicked, which greatly added to his mysterious attraction. She looked across at her husband and felt sorry that he could not wear his clothes with the same easy grace and converse with the same languid indifference. Life with such a man as Glencare might hold things nicer than babies and mothers' meetings.

"Did you see much of the workings of our missionaries when you were in Turkey?" she asked, recalling her reflections with a guilty start.

"I can't say that I did," Lord Glencare admitted, while his thoughts went back in amused memory of Constantinople.

"I think it's so noble of them," she continued, "sacrificing their precious lives in dreadful places, such as China and Burmah for instance."

"I suppose I'm singular," Lord Glencare replied, "but I thought China one of the most fascinating countries I have ever seen."

"But how steeped in spiritual darkness," exclaimed Mrs. Vicar in pious horror.

Lord Glencare was silent while he peeled a walnut for her.

"Jonathan and I always spend most of our yearly holiday to London at Exeter Hall, it's such an uplifting place," she continued.

"I'm sure of that," her companion murmured.

"Do you never go, Lord Glencare?"

"I am afraid I must plead guilty to never going," he answered, then seeing her expression he added hastily, "not that I see any real harm in it."

Just at that moment Lady Cumberland gave the signal.

The evening was long and tedious.

It was not indeed till a very kind but palpable enquiry about the difficulties of the road—seeing that the snow was falling steadily—that Mrs. Vicar took the hint, and she and her spouse departed, followed by a general dispersal.

In two days' time there was skating on the Narrow Water, in air like scarlet and amber wine. The Narrow Water ran for a distance of two miles, and twisted and wound its course in a most fascinating fashion between high banks. Helen Wyverne was an expert skater, so was Glencare, being one of the few couples there who could waltz with ease on the ice. Lady Cumberland, wrapped to the eyes in furs, came and watched from her sleigh, while Lady Henry, very red about the nose, took a turn or two, and was gratified to think that any fears she may have

entertained where Madame St. Clair was concerned had been quite groundless, that lady having departed on the day following Boxing Day. While no one had been sufficiently observant to notice her manner and Glencare.

In fact, for the few days preceding the New Year, and the dance on its eve, Lord Glencare was if not all that an anxious parent could desire still very attentive and much in their company.

Helen on her part accepted his friendly overtures with a certain proud grace that apparently pleased his fancy.

All things seemed to augur well, so much so that Lady Henry once more felt justified in taking out her imagination and giving it, so to speak, a refreshing airing.

The dance on New Year's eve was not a large one ; about a hundred guests from the neighbouring places round.

The three drawing-rooms, white, green and scarlet, which like those at Windsor had hangings and wax-lights to match, were thrown open, and here amidst glow and glitter and music and the faint scent of hot-house reared flowers, Lady Cumberland's friends danced till the wintry dawn appeared.

The hostess opened the affair with the Marquis of Stonehenge in a stately minuet, a dance in which when a girl she had been renowned for her grace and her curtsy. Very splendid did the old lady appear even then, with her gown of brocade, her diamond studded lace covered white hair, fluttering a fan on painted sticks that once had belonged to du Bally.

It was a scene recalling the eighteenth century in its charm and its stateliness.

When the minuet was finished, dancing became general.

Lord Glencare waltzed three times with Helen Wyverne and sat out one.

When the clock from the tower boomed out the first stroke of midnight—the company, headed by Lady Cumberland left the drawing-rooms and went across the hall to where the servants had thrown back the massive doors—through which their mistress, maintaining the old tradition, stepped forth to greet the coming year—a stately figure, the big hall black with age behind her, the snow strewn moon wrapped night beyond, the great trees rising like spectres from the white ground.

Afterwards everyone went to the dining-hall and drank the health of the New Year in goblets of champagne ladled out by the servants from a gold loving cup of immense capacity. Helen Wyverne standing beside Lord Glencare faced her mother on the hither side of the table.

"May it bring you all you wish," he whispered in her ear.

CHAPTER IX

JANUARY found Dallas Dunbar in London.

It was terrible weather, black with the biting winds and lowering ice-filled skies of that season. The streets had assumed that terrible gray appearance so familiar to us all ; the poor horses slipped and fell on the slippery pavements ; the unemployed paraded the highways and byeways with their doleful whinings ; the papers teemed with appeals for money and food and firing for the starving poor. These and the many other delicacies that render this particular time of year so delectable were to be had in abundance without the trouble of asking.

On Dunbar's table lay various unpleasant looking documents, the outcrop of his gay and gallant doings since his return from Brussels.

He and Cave-Browne and Salutaris, together with the Baron, had improved on each other's acquaintance since November. Dallas Dunbar had been introduced to Morrison's people with much success. Morrison always rigidly excluded the Baron or such people from the society of his parents.

The old General had—or fancied he had—some vague acquaintance with or recollection of Lady Duubar which caused him to be extra cordial to her son.

Dallas dined twice or thrice and escorted the two Miss Salutaris' to the play and to Princes for supper. He also took them to the Winter Exhibition and gave them weak tea in Bond Street afterwards, all of which was extremely pleasing to the Baron and Cave-Browne who appreciated to the full the inestimable advantage of any outward seeming of unimpeachable respectability. Then one afternoon when they had attended a Miniature Collection, Dallas exclaimed on a sudden impulse,

“Have you ever been up to your brother's flat in Hay Hill?” to which the girls—they were not pretty girls—replied in the negative. “What do you say to our going and asking him to give us tea, it will be ever so much jollier than one of those bun shops.”

His companions looked at one another. They did not love their matchless brother nearly so much as he loved himself but they feared him. Would Morrison like it? they wondered doubtfully.

“Of course he would,” Dallas reassured them all fellows liked seeing their sisters.

“But he has never invited us,” said the eldest Miss Salutaris, “and Morrison isn't quite like other brothers.”

“Of course not,” was the chary reply, “he does not expect you to stand on such ceremony.”

They were just then turning into Dover Street, so the

two ladies with considerable misgivings but devoured by curiosity allowed themselves to be persuaded.

It never crossed their escorts' mind that Morrison might not be overjoyed. Dallas was really, in spite of much, very innocent and simple, some people might have called it stupidity.

Dealton opened the door of the flat and showed them into the drawing-room where they found Morrison dozing over a French novel with a lurid cover.

He rose at once surprised and considerably annoyed. The former he did not conceal, but out of deference to Dunbar, who was useful, he dissembled the latter and ordered tea.

His sisters moved round the room and voted it quite too charming in their high falsetto voices, and then they suggested, nay insisted, upon a tour of inspection, to which their brother objected. They begged to be allowed to see over it. He almost tearfully announced that he was only sharing the flat of Baron von Kensig, who at that moment was in the smoking-room with an engineer examining plans for proposed work on his property near Mombassa.

"We shall not go near the smoking-room, dear boy," said the youngest sister who was a person of some determination. "Besides we both hate the smell of smoke," she added as a last convincing argument.

"Oh, very well," their brother said in a tone of disgusted resignation.

The fair intruders flitted down the corridor, paused to

examine some risque pictures, peeped in the dining-room, and pronounced its colour scheme delightful, took a glance at the library, and then, by an elaborate accident, entered the smoking-room where no signs of plan or engineer could be seen but the Baron seated on the sofa with a lady of very pronounced charms, with sundry bottles of wine which his fishy eye suggested had certainly suffered from no neglect, while the atmosphere was one cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Come in, old man," he cried in a thick voice at the opening of the door. "Come in and keep us company."

"Gott in Himmel vot you say," cried the lady, but the rest of her eloquence was lost on the two scandalised intruders who retreated hastily to the drawing-room where their brother, a startling and convincing statue of respectability, was preparing to pour out tea.

His monocle, however, fell with a clatter against the cups as he saw the expression on his elder sister's face.

"What's the matter, Maud?" he enquired icily.

"Oh, nothing, only we are afraid we cannot stay any longer, we are very sorry we came."

"Yes, more than sorry," emphasised the younger as they arranged their sable boas and took their gloves and muffs.

"Perhaps Mr. Dunbar will be kind enough to see us into a cab."

Of course the blushing and uncomfortable Dallas would be only too delighted, so with heads uplifted the two ladies, followed by Dunbar, passed out and down the stairs.

Five minutes later, having grasped the situation, Morrison swept like an indignant whirlwind in on the Baron, and with a disgusted glance at the decanters and empty glasses touched the electric bell and then with ostentatious emphasis opened the windows. That gentleman being now alone.

There was a short pregnant and most disagreeable silence, during which time the Baron apologetically shook up the much abused cushions, while Dealton silently but with one all-significant look at both of them removed the debris.

The Baron casting round in his somewhat foggy brain for some way to appease Morrison remarked, as he gave a finishing touch to an amber cushion,

"That is a very beautiful expression, Morrison, you have here in England, 'An honest man is the noblest work of God'."

"You must not be always thinking of me," replied Salutaris. "And now may I enquire what on earth induced you to bring that Elsa creature here?"

The Baron hung his head.

Morrison continued. "Why can't you leave women alone. Every infernal mess you get into is over one. Why not do as I do? I only wish to goodness one could find some land full of mugs with the female sex eliminated."

"I am very sorry," began the Baron humbly, "damn Elsa, let us forget her. But were *they* really your sisters? So innocent, so handsome, I should never have thought

they were any relation of yours—but you must please forgive me.”

“I am excessively annoyed,” continued Morrison, moving restlessly from one foot to another. “The whole thing is most unfortunate. Possibly my sisters have no morals, one never knows, but they have intense respectability.”

The speaker threw up his head as he said this with an air of conscious virtue.

“Ah, Morris, you are so generous, you are all heart,” rejoined the Baron.

The recipient of these compliments gave a contented sniff.

The Baron came over and laid a conciliatory hand on the other’s shoulder.

“I’ve been thinking, old man, that if we stay together we must start a legitimate business.”

“What I have always said,” snapped Salutaris. “What do you propose?”

“Oh, just a little sharpening, blackmail, and borrowing any nice jewellery we see lying around in hotels. You see, Morris, no one shall ever say that Rudolph von Kensig is not a gentleman.”

“Naturally, my dear Baron,” was the irritable reply. “We are both men of honour, and now pull yourself together and let us discuss the evening, the people who are coming to dinner, and our immediate plans for the future. It is pleasant enough here, but we can last but a very little while at the rate money is going.”

Morris, who hated fresh air, had now closed the windows, and was standing on the tiger skin hearth-rug facing the Baron who prepared with his accustomed obedience to listen to the oracle.

Observing Von Kensig's attitude Morrison advanced to a rosewood desk and took out a forbidding-looking ledger.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Baron, "grace after dinner, not before."

"Don't be ridiculous," was the retort, "your levity is almost as unpleasant as your drinking."

"You could not say that I drink, Morrison," said Von Kensig reproachfully, "I wet my tongue, that is all, no more. Besides, on the ground of health, the doctors order at least one quart of liquid in the twenty-four ——"

"Do be quiet, my dear Baron."

As Morrison gave this order a floating spot in his left eye which resembled an immature poached egg seemed to advance toward von Kensig who was reduced to silence.

"Now you will listen to a few chastening facts," saying which he opened the ledger and Von Kensig resigned himself to the inevitable, not however without a protest. Leaning forward in his chair, his hands clasped together, he said,

"Why worry, Morrison, when we have carrying on money for two or three months and plenty of things to take to the 'pound' shop? Why not have a hell of a time till we are comfortably broke again? Besides we can certainly buy all London on tick from here."

"There you are absolutely wrong," interrupted Morrison, looking up, "the wine merchant's man would not leave even one dozen of that idiotic Rhine wine you ordered at thirty-six pounds a dozen. By the way, even the young German footman you found wants to leave to get work in a restaurant or in a permanent family as he puts it, this place being only furnished and by the week. Considering that we have had him four days only, that his liveries have cost twenty pounds and could not be altered to fit any other living creature, that he has smashed up about half the glass we have bought, that he considers every drop of wine and liqueur left on the table as his legitimate perquisite, and that he stands at the door with his dirty hand wide open for a tip even from you or I, to say nothing of any one else who calls here.

I really must ask you to provide for any other relatives you may have in England in some way less annoying—to say nothing of the expense—than pressing them into our service. For four days call this fifty pounds, or twelve pounds ten shillings daily. Then there is the cook you found for thirty pounds a month, and who draws five pounds a day whether we are here or not for the expenses of the dining-room and kitchen, and heaven only knows how much more if we have anything to eat; your arrangement for flowers from the pretty little florist round the corner at two pounds a day, but who will not even send me a buttonhole without the cash; then again there are only three bedrooms for servants, one for the cook, Holmes

being married sleeps out, it is true your cousin and the German kitchenmaid have stretched a string across the second room as a screen."

"He told me he could find accommodation for himself at the Berkeley for ten shillings a night including his tips and early tea."

Von Kensig grinned and then remarked,

"So even *your* paragon has his faults. He looked very well at Sandown, I remember, in your newest frock coat and your field glasses."

"In my clothes! What an intolerable liberty," cried Morrison, "I will sack him at once."

"Is that quite wise?" queried Von Kensig.

"My dear Baron, please let me finish summing up our affairs. The electric light people would not give us a glim without a fifteen pounds deposit; the porter, lift man and superintendent of this building simply shook about ten pounds out of me, between them, before they would recognise us as tenants. "They meant touching while we had a feather to fly with and looked as if they thought we would very soon moult. Everyone treats us alike, and even if I hire a brougham or a saddle horse for the morning it is ready money down. We must face facts."

"Who can have blown on us?" mused the Baron.

"I really don't know. It is beastly unpleasant, but I am afraid that though we are *in* Hay Hill we appear to be obviously not of it and these devils belonging to the place quite realise the fact.

" Luckily though, Morrison, Holmes can to some extent place us."

" My dear Baron, one does not come to Hay Hill at this expense to be introduced into society by one's valet," as he said this Salutaris leaned back more comfortably in his chair, wearily casting up blue eyes artistically streaked with yellow in compliment to the golden surroundings.

" Quite right, Morrison, but you forget Holmes' first master lives in the opposite flat to ours. He got Holmes six months for a mere nothing, so is sure to want to help him now while he can easily do so by seeing us and asking about him."

" Probably he would have done that if Holmes had not made a blasted idiot of himself to-day."

" How so ? " asked the Baron.

" Our neighbour as you call him, and who by the way looks like a policeman, was going downstairs when he saw Holmes at our door waiting to smuggle your turkey hen into the coal cellar."

" ' That you, Holmes ? ' he asked.

" ' Yes, sir. '

" I happened to be in the ante-room so could hear every word without being seen."

" ' Your trouble over ? eh what ? '

" ' Yes sir, thank you, sir. '

" ' What are you doing now ? '

" ' Valet to Baron von Kensig. '

" ' Keeping straight ? '

" 'I am, sir.'

" 'What the devil do you mean?'

" 'Begging your pardon, sir, the situation though it suits me is a peculiar one. We are always travelling, and unless we can do a little sharpening we haven't got a stiver to spend. Half the mugs don't even pay.'

" 'Delighted to hear they don't. You are properly placed, Holmes, and I will tell the hall porter to keep an eye on you and your master too.'

" Then he took the lift while Holmes very kindly helped himself to a tumbler full of that old brandy that you and I can only afford to smell occasionally."

Von Kensig laughed as usual.

" The fact we have to face, my dear Baron, is that we cannot afford to go broke here as there would be no credit. By the way whom do we expect to-night? "

" No one that I know of."

" No one, well then I shall have to go out and forage round."

" Oh, Morrison, I do feel bad, let us have a quiet night."

" Nonsense, my dear Baron, if you would only continue on the water wagon you would never be ill, it's entirely your own fault."

The following morning Cave-Browne received an urgent wire from Scotland asking for a pack of marked cards to be sent immediately. Browne, who to give him his due did not know where they could be got, went straight to Hay Hill to consult Salutaris.

He found Morrison in his bedroom arrayed in a pale blue satin dressing-gown, attacking the only breakfast that his delicate organisation could ever face—two green apples and a glass of iced water, while Dealton went solemnly through the wardrobe and the boot cupboard.

"I shall wear the grey, Dealton," he was saying, "with my purple underclothing, my new corset, the amethyst links and pin, and be sure the buttonhole is of English violets not Parma," adding, "I like to encourage British industries."

"Excuse me, sir," replied Dealton with an almost inaudible cough, "but I'm afraid the grey is impossible."

"Why?" enquired Morrison looking up irritably from examining his elaborate manicure case.

"Well, sir, the fact is the London air is so very hexpansive, sir, I've noticed it myself, and you so sensitive as you are Sir." Dealton's eyes wandered discreetly towards the ceiling.

"I suppose you mean I'm growing horribly fat and you're afraid to say so," said Salutaris, and indeed he only wanted a drainpipe shaped curl over his forehead at that moment to have been the personification of an advertisement for somebody's patent food.

"Oh no, sir," exclaimed his man hastily. "Nothing of the kind I assure you, sir."

"They will cost twenty pounds," he told his visitor when he had explained the object of his visit, "if you come back at three o'clock, I'll have them for you. And now, my dear fellow, I shall not ask you to stay as my morning is fully occupied," and with an almost royal gesture of grace-

ful dismissal Morrison rose from his chair and summoned Dealton.

When Cave-Browne presented himself in the afternoon he found Salutaris seated moodily smoking cigarettes by the fire in the library. It was horribly cold without but deliciously warm within, so Cave-Browne drew the most comfortable chair and without waiting to be invited helped himself to a cigar.

"What's the matter?" he enquired laconically.

"The usual thing—funds getting low."

"We must arrange some business."

Morrison became slightly more animated at these words.

"Do you know of any or does Dallas? I don't like to speak to him direct."

"No, don't do that, it would be a mistake," exclaimed Cave-Browne.

"I thought so," exclaimed Morrison.

"Dunbar is difficult to manage, has attacks of conscience now and then," said Cave-Browne as he mixed himself a brandy and soda at Salutaris' suggestion.

"How perfectly fatuous," cried Morrison with a fine sneer.

"Of course it is, but apt to be deuced awkward. You see, of course, Dallas was born and brought up as a gentleman.

"I quite understand that," was the impatient reply.

"I wonder if you do," pondered his guest, while aloud he remarked, "Yes, it's a great handicap to a career."

"But to business," interrupted Morrison. "I suppose you can handle his conscience as you did the other day."

"I daresay I can; as to the business I have in view it's with a cousin of Dunbars—a very distant one certainly, but still a cousin."

"Yes, well who is he?" Salutaris sat forward while the firelight caught and reflected the cabochon rings that adorned his fat fingers.

Cave-Browne deliberately drank his brandy and soda before replying, an irritating trick of his.

Then he said slowly, "Lord Lackington, the biggest gambler in London, only if it came off my friend, Barney Bantam, would have to be in the game because he is his fledgling." Salutaris had crossed the room and was busily searching through the peerage.

"Whose son is he?" he enquired.

"Lord Underwood's eldest son."

"But he does not settle."

"Oh yes, he will with us, Barney Bantam can place his bills for £10,000 to-morrow. He might play again without Barney and *those* bills no doubt I could plant."

"There I am not with you, Browne, because I happen to know Bantam, and he is the last man to be left out in the cold, anyhow the Baron and I *never* do that." The speaker resumed his seat by the fire and took out a perfectly gorgeous cigar case.

"Well, we'll see."

"Anyway," continued Morrison striking a match, "Bantam is a bit thick *even* for us."

"Yes, I know he's hotter than the devil's favourite son, assented Cave-Browne, "but occasionally very useful."

"If it can be managed where would the game be?"

"Here, my dear fellow, I would get Dunbar to bring him on after dinner."

"We can't share with Dallas and Bantam too," exclaimed Morrison, "it's too many."

"I'll take care of him," Cave-Browne announced, "and now I must be making tracks," he rose as he spoke.

"When will you report progress, I tell you I am getting confoundedly hard up?"

"To-morrow, if possible, I don't want to lose any more time than yourself, you bet."

"Do you know Lackington?" enquired Morrison more as an afterthought than anything else. "If so, couldn't you tackle him yourself?"

"Impossible, my dear fellow, Dallas must engineer it—so long," and then the hall door closed behind him.

Cave-Browne had not been gone many minutes when the Baron came in. He appeared excited.

"Morrison," he cried, "I met Barney Bantam at the 'Coal Hole' just now. He was with Weaver, you remember, the old Commodore, and a mining engineer named Bowling Score."

"Well, my dear Baron, and what of it?" exclaimed Salutaris with much impatience.

"We are saved, my dear fellow, Barney has Lord Lackington on the string and will bring him to dinner to-night."

"But," gasped Morrison, "I have just been talking to Cave-Browne, he was going to arrange."

"Never mind, Browne," exclaimed the Baron, "I've accomplished it. I had to include Weaver and this man Score because he is perfectly sound and really owns a gold mine. Congratulate me."

"But if Browne should hear of it?" suggested Morrison anxiously.

"It won't matter, we shall be in Cairo, my dear chap, so it won't matter," was the Baron's optimistic answer.

"Well, if you think it's all right—"

"You see, Morrison, we must have money and plenty of it or it is better to die."

Salutaris sighed, and in so doing agreed.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck seven silver strokes.

"They are to be here at 8 o'clock. We must have a drink or two before, as it may be a late sitting and we both need bracing up," said the Baron.

"Drink! you are always drinking," answered the other savagely, "as for myself I shall go and be massaged as an aid to thought," and, taking his cigarette case with him, he left the room.

When Cave-Browne quitted Hay Hill he took a hansom and drove home to his chambers in Little Stanhope Street, ruminating many things as he went. He did not anticipate

much trouble with Dunbar ; the boy—Cave-Browne always regarded him as such—was getting easier every day. After all it's only the first reluctant steps whether of a child or man that are the real difficulty.

Having reached his own room he called Dallas on the telephone, when the following conversation took place.

"Is that you, old chap?"

"Yes."

"Can you get your cousin Lackington to dine in Hay Hill to-morrow evening and have a game?"

"I don't know," came somewhat slowly over the wire.

"You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Can't afford to have any objections now," this last was tinged with bitterness.

"That's right," came Cave-Browne's cheery tones.

"As a matter of fact I'm dining with his people to-night.

"Oh! you are, are you?"

"Yes, I'll see what I can do."

"Will you come on to me afterwards."

"Perhaps, can't promise. Good-bye."

At 9:30 Dallas Dunbar presented himself in Stanhope Street.

"You're early," exclaimed Cave-Browne, who had taken his dinner alone and was enjoying a novel and a smoke in an arm-chair.

"Yes, they were all going on to the pantomime, and as I never could stand that kind of amusement I came away," answered the young man as he divested himself of his coat

and muffler and came over and stretched out his hands to the blaze.

"Well?"

"Oh, Lackington wasn't there to-night and you can guess I didn't broach the subject to his father."

Cave-Browne laughed.

"I should say not."

"I'll try and see him to-morrow. I've never liked him so have no compunction in putting him through."

"Good," was his host's comment, "you are improving under my fond fostering care."

"What are you going to do to-night?" enquired Dallas.

"Nothing, except we might if you like ring up Morrison and see if he's in and alone, and go round for a chat."

"Yes, all right, later on," agreed Dunbar, "and then we can lay plans."

CHAPTER X

THE first arrivals at Hay Hill were Commodore Weaver and his friend Mr. Bowling Score. The Commodore self-constituted, tall, dark, quick in his movements, and anxious to place Bowling Score well before his hosts, was quite miserable for fear any admiration should be diverged from himself. After the first greetings had been exchanged, he talked a good deal about his yacht and handed to Morrison his card which looked like an advertisement as it bore the name of his boat and then that of a London and a New York hotel.

Mr. Bowling Score on entering had favoured his hosts with a sweeping bow and a nervous, pointless little laugh. He was a tall, thin, unhealthy looking man, and it was not many minutes before his host discovered that he could only catch Bowling Score's eye unexpectedly and that when they were not conversing together. Both the Commodore, as he styled himself, and Bowling Score loved to hear themselves talk and soon made an opportunity on a pre-arranged signal saying, when the former enquired how the latter's great mine

was progressing, "The latest cable from the Dizzy Mine is splendid and shows that we really have a bonanza," was the gratified answer, the speaker carefully dividing his coat tails as if to put them out of harm's way before sitting down.

"You sure have," the Commodore agreed with his American drawl.

"Where is it?" asked Morrison.

"In the Republic of Columbia," began Score.

"You must tell me all about it," said Salutaris.

Before, however, Mr. Score could comply with a request answered so much to his taste, the butler announced Lord Lackington and Mr. Barney Bantam. In spite of this interruption and the necessary pause consequent on their entrance, Bowling Score continued talking about the Dizzy Mine, even continuing his conversation in the corridor leading to the dining-room when dinner had been formally announced.

Morrison had led the way followed by Lackington, a tall handsome youth of twenty-two, with a great simplicity and charm of manner. The rest of the party followed.

The dining-room was a very pretty octagon with handsome embossed leather chairs and hangings of maroon velvet. A round table of generous proportions glittered with silver and Venetian glass. The shaded lights were arranged with delicate deference to Morrison's complexion, which in the evening was apt to assume rainbow tints. The air was heavy with the scent of purple and white lilac.

It was an exquisite dinner perfectly served, and under its genial influence conversation became general.

Salutaris tried to talk sport to Lord Lackington. Bantam remembering his occasional shilling trips in the *Sky-lark* at Brighton gave Commodore Weaver much valuable information about yachting. Von Kensig listened with polite attention to everybody, while Score settled down to a serious wrestle with his dinner.

Lord Lackington had a fine easy to the manner born air which contrasted very strangely with his host's jerky self-confidence, the Commodore's frank vulgarity and Bowling Score's shifty, restless movements which seemed to commence with his false teeth rattling like castanets and did not end with his conversation. Morrison Salutaris fully understood that brevity is quite as much the soul of a good dinner as it is of wit, therefore the meal lasted only one hour and ten minutes and this he felt to be a distinct credit to the establishment.

Just as coffee was being served, and the door open for a second or so, Morrison's quick ear caught a telephone call, which was answered by Dealton, but he was unable to hear the conversation, which, was from Cave-Browne enquiring if there was anyone dining in Hay Hill that evening.

Hearing that Cave-Browne said he would come round for a few minutes but Lord Lackington was there, Dealton was not on any account to say anything to Mr. Salutaris or the Baron.

The party had drawn up close together for dessert. Score's tongue was for the moment at rest; Morrison and the Baron were wondering how soon the Commodore and his friend would leave. Bantam was as anxious as his hosts to adjourn to the card room but the Commodore himself—no mean performer with the devil's bible—had no idea of being left out of anything. Bowling Score as usual waited developments like an obscene toad, in fact each and every man of them was wondering how and by how much he was to benefit by the despoliation of Lackington, when suddenly Dealton flung open the door and announced Mr. Cave-Browne and Mr. Dunbar.

Cave-Browne entered first, wearing his usual immobile expression.

"I really must apologise, Salutaris, I did not think of asking whether you were alone."

Then Dallas exclaimed, "Hullo, Lackington, how are you? I have just been dining with your people and have been trying to find you."

Without waiting to be introduced to Score or Weaver, upon whom he vouchsafed a collective nod, Browne sat down and helped himself to a cigarette quite oblivious to the thunder cloud gathering on Morrison's brow. He determined to be in at the death or take Lackington away when he left.

"By the way, old man," Dallas said as he sank into a seat beside his cousin, "your father thinks there may be a shindy down at the house to-night, shall we go there and

see what is forward? We could have some supper at Pratt's and *écarté* at White's afterwards."

Before Lord Lackington could make any reply Morrison interposed,

"I want a few words with you, Browne, I have been chasing you all day. Come into the library." Then he convened a move into the smoking room for the others.

Once in the library Salutaris turned on Browne.

"What brings you here," he demanded.

"Business, and of course pleasure."

Morrison gave a snarl. "No side with me."

Browne was as cool as ever as he replied,

"You need not think you can take on Lackington without me. By the way who's in this, and how was it you never said a word about it this afternoon?"

"The Baron had everything arranged without my knowledge," was the reply.

"Well, who's in it?"

"Bantam and the Baron directly. And we shall have to let this man Score win a little. Commodore Weaver who brought Score here on legitimate business is one of us, therefore you will understand that he must have a full share."

"Go on," commanded the other.

"You see there are already too many people to divide, so you really can't butt in. It is not my fault that the Baron landed your man before you did."

The speaker ended almost tearfully and was half inclined

to remind Browne of the advantages that had accrued to him through their acquaintance.

While he was debating this nice point Browne answered,

"You are quite right, the money can't be so much cut up. Score and Weaver must go at once, you understand."

"I don't funk Score, in fact he doesn't matter," pleaded Morrison, "but Weaver is a most dangerous brute. I have known him for years and I would far sooner he had my share than annoy him."

Cave-Browne smiled.

"Never funk, my dear fellow, I will get rid of Weaver, never mind how."

And he did so.

The game was *écarté*, its result a foregone conclusion, except as to the amount to be lost to all, except Bowling Score and Lord Lackington.

Bantam wanted to play, but Lord Lackington gracefully remarked,

"What's the use of your playing if you can't pay me the pony I lent you last week?"

"Allow me to give your lordship a cheque for the amount," replied Barney with carefully assumed dignity.

"No no, Barney, you don't take me on with stumers. Come on, Baron, shall it be fifty or a hundred a game?" he turned to Von Kensig, who answered,

"As you like."

"May I stand ten per cent. of your winnings or losses, Baron?" asked Barney Bantam anxiously.

"Yes, with pleasure. How far do you wish to go?"

"I can pay up to a hundred in the morning and am ready to take up to any amount you win."

"Right you are, you are ten per cent. with me till I lose a thousand."

* * * * *

Lord Lackington and the Baron started play, the other men looking on and making between themselves or with the Baron, who was ready to back himself.

Although Bowling Score knew by instinct that Morrison Salutaris was a villain, he did not suspect the Baron—who was a greater one, perhaps. He lost a few sovereigns backing Lord Lackington, whom he had heard played a fine game. He soon departed fully determined to rope both Morrison and the Baron into the Dizzy Mine, while so cursing his folly for straying from his own narrow if not straight path in the city. His principles were too lofty to tolerate being separated from even the smallest sum.

When play had lasted about half an hour and Lord Lackington had lost a certain appreciable sum, Von Kensig to his dismay saw no suggestion of cash or even an I.O.U. from him.

As said before, Barney Bantam had an interest with him of ten per cent.

"What are you fellows playing for?" he now asked. "Your stakes are in no way represented."

"You are quite right, Bantam, here is my limit for to-night. Give me your cheque for one hundred and you

can settle the other hundred later if I lose the whole lot."

So saying the Baron put two Bank of England notes on the table. Each black whirligig tail bore the magic words one thousand.

Lackington's eyes glistened at the sight as he squared up to the table. He apologised for only having about £200 or £300 about him, saying that for over £1,000 in addition to that sum he would have to give short bills.

He soon lost his ready money, then £1,000 for which he gave a cheque, a further £1,000 covered by an I.O.U. Then he asked that the games be for £500 a side each, to which the Baron agreed.

Quite unobserved Mr. Bantam slipped out of the room returning in a few minutes with a pocket book in his hand.

"How do we stand now, Baron?" he asked.

"I am a winner of £3,000 in I.O.U's. Am I correct?" he addressed his partner.

"Perfectly," assented Lord Lackington.

"Very well then, as I am interested and as I never play for marbles," commenced Barney Bantam, "if Lord Lackington wishes to go on I propose that he accept these three bills for £1,000 each. After Lord Lackington's rudeness to me I insist upon bills now, and expect you to bear me out, Baron."

"You are in a hell of a hurry to conclude that I leave off a loser, Barney," cried Lackington. "Shall we

continue our game, Baron?" and he turned towards Von Kensig.

"I stop at £10,000, or if you prefer it, I will give you these bills for what I already owe you and leave off."

Bantam produced the bills already made out, while his accomplices reflected in their various ways.

No flies on Barney, but what an awful bounder, etc. etc.

"Lord love a duck," Lackington interposed, "let me sign and cut it thick. Bantam has bought the stamps for the first time in his life with his own money, anyhow he will have to get my paper melted in the morning. I will sign the bally lot," saying which he did so.

The game progressed with the inevitable result that the newly accepted bills passed to the Baron.

Lackington would have liked to continue playing, but seeing that it was nearly five o'clock he started to his feet exclaiming,

"Heavens! nearly five. I have just time to get into uniform for one of those beastly march outs. I feel like a boiled owl. Thanks, I will have a B.S. and a jolly stiff one too."

The Baron mixed the drink and then Lackington being promised his revenge took his departure, Dallas Dunbar at a sign from Cave-Browne accompanying him.

Bantam drew the Baron well away from the others. "Now, Baron," he continued, "you must draw these bills which you see mature at three months. Right! please

endorse them. Right again. They are now negotiable documents and have only to pass into the hands of an innocent holder for value to become incontestable. This young stinker won't return from his march out till 10.30. A bath and getting into mufti will take at least an hour, so he cannot see a lawyer till noon. He may want to put in an injunction under the Baby Act to prevent your dealing with his paper. We must take no chances, please be in my office in Albemarle Street not later than 9.30. We will then go to Regent Street and see my friend Wordley, of whom of course you have heard. He is known as the Financial Barometer."

The Baron nodded his head.

"We will give him a five pound note and he will draw an open cheque, payable to your order for eight thousand five hundred pounds, and this will be cashed immediately the bank opens. The amount and the time of presentation will impress itself on the mind of the paying teller in case there is an action."

"Will I go to the bank with this cheque?" asked Von Kensing.

"Well, no, not exactly, old boy," replied Bantam, "Wordley is quite able to go round the world without a guide. He will cash his own cheque and I think I can persuade him to give three thousand pounds for the bills."

"Not a bally oat under five thousand pounds," Morrison having caught the last few words snapped out.

"You are a greedy beast and want all for yourself," said Von Kensig.

"Shut up or talk sense," supplemented Cave-Browne in icy tones. "Mr. Bantam is perfectly right up to the point of giving Wordley five pounds for drawing his cheque and having it cashed before Lackington can make an effectual kick, after that he does not appear to place a full and proper value on the documents we have to deal with in our mutual interests. I will undertake to get Dallas to explain the circumstances to Lord Inderwood. I know that he will pay six thousand pounds to settle and send the cub to one of the Embassies to keep him out of mischief."

"Capital," cried Morrison and the Baron, but the suggestion did not at all fall in with Mr. Bantam's views.

The fact was that on the previous afternoon he had agreed to sell Wordley £10,000 of Lord Lackington's paper for £6,000 out of which he would receive from Lackington his usual commission of ten per cent. upon the sum discounted—£1,000.

Under the plan proposed by Cave-Browne he would have to forego this as well as the other £2,000 he proposed to keep back from his associates.

By his own plan he would have £3,750 counting his quarter of the £3,000 he professed to receive from Wordley ; by the other arrangement one quarter only of the money paid by Lord Inderwood—£1,500.

It was worth fighting for.

He looked at Cave-Browne, their eyes met. Barney

Bantam remembered a similar occasion three years before in which he had been the aggressor.

"It's no use, Browne," he said, "so you needn't try it on. That young Dunbar is about as much related to Lord Inderwood as I am. Perhaps it is some time since he has included me in his house-parties."

The speaker feeling very sure of his ground and so was correspondingly insolent.

"I'll make you eat your words, you dirty counter-jumping hound," cried Cave-Browne advancing towards him, but here the Baron—ever the peacemaker—interposed while Morrison from the safe distance of the hearth-rug gazed in almost tearful entreaty from one to the other. Barney Bantam shook off the Baron's detaining hand and faced Cave-Browne.

"No doubt I am a hound, I was born and brought up with the criminal classes. You and Dunbar started with birth, placed relatives and a profession. Here we are thrown together cutting up one of his consins and your friends. Where do you so greatly excel me?" asked Bantam.

"By Jove, you are right, but let us continue the cutting up," replied Cave-Browne in his unruffled manner, adding, "You have put the case very fairly, Mr. Bantam."

"Let Von Kensig decide then," said Bantam.

Morrison and the Baron brought drinks and cigars, temperate arguments, soft words and ardent waters, fearful lest the old adage "when thieves fall out honest men get their own" might intrude itself into their present affair.

"Fairly put," resumed Browne. "The bills are in Von Kensig's hands, he shall settle how they are to be dealt with. If I handle them you shall have your full share, I mean to deal fairly with all you blackguards, make what I want out of you of course, then quit you till the next time. Now, Baron, what about the bills?"

Catching Morrison's mental telegraphy the Baron said,

"I am sorry you don't like our profession, but I think Bantam had better legalize the bills, as he suggests, with me to-morrow morning, and then I will hand them to you or Dunbar to sell to Lord Inderwood, which will be best for us all if he buys."

All the necessary details were completed before the afternoon, after which Cave-Browne had a long and heated argument with Dallas, and as a result that youth most reluctantly consented to call on Lord Inderwood.

* * * * *

"I have come on rather unpleasant business, sir," he announced when he found himself in the old man's presence.

"I am getting accustomed to that. Is it about Lackington?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me as briefly as possible, Dallas, and also explain how you come to be mixed up in it."

"Last night I got home from dining here and just as I was going to bed I had an invitation over the telephone for cards. You know my weakness, sir. I found my friends already playing for very high stakes and Lackington

a heavy loser. I tried to persuade him to leave off at once, however he gave acceptances for his losses." This in a sense was true as Dallas *had* put up a mild protest.

"I thank you for *that*, Dallas, that was loyal of you. How much did he lose?"

"Ten thousand pounds." Lord Inderwood's face paled with rage then grew purple.

"He must leave the Guards, he exclaimed. To pay half such a sum even, would be unfair to my other children."

"I secured the bills, sir. A money lender has offered £6,000 for them and this the winners are willing to accept now instead of waiting till they mature. Don't you think it better to take them for that sum yourself instead of having to pay the sum in full in three months?"

After a brief consideration Lord Inderwood agreed and gave a cheque for six thousand pounds.

The £6,000 was handed to Cave-Browne who cashed it and divided with his friends, after which Morrison and the Baron had a settlement.

The former had had a business training in his father's firm which now stood him in good stead.

That very evening Lord Lackington had a more than unpleasant interview with his father in which the old man expressed his strong disapproval of his son's accepting invitations to dinners with rank outsiders.

"Dallas was there, sir," said Lackington.

"That is no reason whatsoever why you should be.

However, I am going to make my own enquiries. Meanwhile get back to barracks at Windsor, sir."

* * * * *

"I do feel a thorough swine, Browne," Dallas Dunbar said miserably, as they had a drink together at the "Blue Posts."

His friend gave a short laugh. "I don't believe you'll ever become a real ornament of the profession," he said.

"I'm sure I don't want to," was the quick retort.

Cave-Browne called for two more whiskies and sodas.

"It's a mistake," he said slowly, "to speak badly of the bridge which, if it does not exactly carry one over, at least stems the tide of one's difficulties."

Dallas paled.

"Yes," he said, "I'm developing into every kind of boulder, there's no doubt."

"You dwell too much on yourself, my dear chap, it isn't healthy."

"I wonder now that you're getting old you don't chuck it," the younger man remarked thoughtfully.

"Old," echoed Browne in displeasure, "really youth has some very insolent phrases."

"I'm sorry," muttered Dunbar.

"Well, and what if I am growing old?" exclaimed the other. "I owe age at least one big debt of gratitude; it has swept away the uncomfortable scruples and susceptibilities of my younger days."

"I suppose that's a good thing," mused Dallas.

"Good! why next to a big bank balance it's the best thing in life. It's only when those sort of things are comfortably dead and buried that one really begins to live."

"What was the date of the funeral of yours?"

Browne gave another of his short laughs.

"Long before I'd reached your age anyway," he replied. "If I had been like you, Dallas," he continued, "I would have become a parson."

"Why a parson of all people?"

"Because, although you've got a weak will you have a very big want."

"Those are two unpleasant possessions anyway," Dunbar answered.

"Very unpleasant," was the laconic response.

"You see I never seem to be able to leave the home teaching quite behind," the younger man exclaimed in a burst of what was almost a return to boyish confidence.

It was curious that even at this stage of the game he failed to realise how completely lost were such sentiments on his hearers.

"That's it," agreed Browne, "mother's own boy kind of thing, you've had your brains stuffed full of out of date notions. This thing is right and the other is disgraceful, and that a young man must not consult his empty pocket or his inclinations but must always remember how King Arthur, or Don Quixote or some such Johnnie would have behaved under the same circumstances." The speaker

ordered two more drinks. "Yes," he continued, "I know these good people with their preaching, their monstrous morality and their leviathan ignorance of the world in which others are compelled to live."

"There is no doubt a lot of truth in what you say," Dallas Dunbar conceded.

"There is a whole volume of everyday wisdom in it, my boy," Cave-Browne remarked as he drew from his pocket a bundle of notes, and fingering them with royal carelessness handed one for ten pounds to the waiter.

"But there are some things you know, Browne, from which one can't get away," the other said after a pause.

"What things? I've got away from pretty well everything that is uncomfortable; *that* is the true secret of all happiness."

Dallas Dunbar gave a short impatient sigh.

"What exact things did you mean just now?" the elder man enquired, as after greeting several acquaintances they went slowly homewards.

"Well, the profession as you call it. How do you really regard it?"

"My dear boy, to my thinking our profession is by no means as bad as what the world is pleased to consider it."

"How so?"

"We are just as honourable as other business men, though the fact is not recognised." He paused for a moment then continued, "We take greater risks when we spend hundreds to catch a mug than a money lender

who advances a sum to a man of decent standing with a couple of friends jumping up behind the bill, or a stockbroker—pernicious race—who gives the same man equal credit, and if he can't come up to time frighten the life out of him with the dread of legal proceedings."

"Yes, and—" murmured Dallas.

"Again we compare favourably with celebrated surgeons who, sufficiently tempted, will amputate a limb they know to be good for many years, or open a body to look for a cancer when they know that the only trouble is an over-worked liver."

"I wonder if you're really right, perhaps you are. Napoleon had a poor opinion of doctors."

"I'll give you another instance," pursued Cave-Browne. "Why are we so much worse than certain eminent K.C.'s who pocket the fees marked on their briefs in a case they know to be hopeless, haven't the grace to appear in court to do talking as a salve to their dupe's depleted cheque book. I could give you many other examples but it would only bore us both. Life from Parliament down to the gutter is a game of bragging—bluff and amazing hypocrisy—and although we are treated as pariahs, we are very little worse than our neighbours."

"I daresay you are not far from wrong," Dunbar said as they parted at Hamilton Place.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Dallas reached home he found a letter in his cousin's hand-writing. His heart gave a sudden throb. It was weeks and weeks since he had even seen her.

The letter contained only a few lines :—

“I write now to ask you if you can manage an invitation for the Windsor Hunt Ball. We are going, and I do so want to see you, dear. I positively starve for a word or a look from my indifferent cousin. Mama never mentions you and looked daggers when she saw your photograph on my table the other day. She is not going to the ball fortunately, that's why I dare to suggest your coming. And you will come, won't you ?

Your most attached,

H.”

The Hunt Ball was to be held on the following week. Helen Wyverne was with friends in Ascot, who drove over in an omnibus about 11.30 when the dancing was in full life and rythm. The men in pink, the officers of the guards, the music, the flash of jewels, the light, the glitter, the talk, the laughter were at its height.

Helen Wyverne's card was immediately besieged, but while her eager would-be partners craved permission to inscribe their names she was looking down and about the great room for someone where the dancers swirled and twirled in a circle of glow and gold, silver and satin and scarlet. Those dazzling eyes of hers eagerly explored the faces of the gay crowd as one who seeks a single face amongst a thousand.

Then all at once her roving glance came to anchor, she gave a happy sigh. Dallas Dunbar had seen her and was already threading his difficult way through the throng to her side.

Her chaperone and hostess, Mrs. Herbert of Raby, a kindly lady of mature years, happily knew of no objection attaching to the handsome graceful person of Dallas when on Helen's introduction he bowed before her. Five minutes later they had joined the rest and were gliding down the room to the strains of the most perfect waltz in the world, "The Blue Danube."

"Ah, Helen," he murmured in her ear at last, and his eyes were shining with the happy, careless look of long, long ago. For the moment they became just boy and girl together again, the children who had played in the gardens of his old home and of hers.

The scene around them faded away, the music sank into silence, both saw only the river Avon under a western sky one golden evening in September. A lovely evening with colours like jewelled houses and fiery fairy palaces in

the clouds overhead, when the water flowers and swaying reeds and grasses took on a curiously aerial grace. There they had lingered together talking of many things, lingered till the sun sank and sombre shadows began to creep across the fields. It was then he had first kissed her.

Dallas Dunbar had never forgotten that evening, and the proud, high-bred face with the long black lashes lying against the pallor of her skin—never, never. With a start they both came back to the hunt ball.

"And where have you been, Dal, all this time," his cousin asked as he swung her round with science and skill at an awkward corner.

"The same old round, and yet not quite the same, because I never see you now," he answered.

"No," she said, "mamma has not been well, so I go to very few places.

"Aunt Alicia always enjoyed bad health I remember," he told her drily.

"Hush, you mustn't say these things."

"I know, I know," Dunbar exclaimed impatiently. "I lack respect, duty, affection, devotion; it is lamentable, but nevertheless it is true."

Just then the music gave signs of slackening.

"Come and sit and talk," he entreated, "just for a little while and I'll get you a hot ice. The ices are invariably hot at an English public ball and the soup is invariably cold."

"We will not mind such trifles," Helen said.

They sat together till the next dance commenced.

"Mamma wants so much to get over to Monte Carlo," his cousin told him after a few minutes more intimate conversation.

"Yes," he murmured, as he smoothed her fan with a thoughtful air, "and—well—"

"I should love it, Dal, I've never been there."

"It wouldn't suit you, I know it."

"But why not?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you, only it wouldn't. Helen," he cried suddenly leaning towards her, "if I had fifty thousand pounds would you defy your mother and marry me?"

"But, Dal, you never could have such a sum as that," she exclaimed.

"Never mind whether I could or could not," he answered angrily, "only if I had it would you—would you?"

"Yes, I think so," her voice was strangled into something like a sob.

He rose to his feet, his eyes shone, his hands trembled.

"Say 'yes' once again," he murmured hoarsely looking down at her.

Helen Wyverne had risen also.

"I say it again," she replied, "but it is impossible and you know it."

"Nothing is impossible, the only really impossible thing is that we should separate," he answered. "Come, the band is just beginning."

CHAPTER XII

"BROWNE, I want £50,000," exclaimed Dallas Dunbar, breaking in like a very whirlwind on the scholarly solitude of his mentor the following day.

"My dear fellow, we most of us want the moon at some time or other and end by being glad to accept a Stilton cheese," was the calm reply, while the speaker proceeded with the finishing touches to his morning toilet, it then being just one o'clock.

"Don't mock me," entreated the younger man.

"I'm not mocking you."

"But would it not be possible to get it?"

"Not at one sitting, we might gradually. Personally I've handled more as my share in a season."

Dallas Dunbar looked up at the speaker from the depths of the chair into which he had thrown himself a moment before.

"Have you really?" he exclaimed hopefully. His conscience now being comfortably interred.

"Yes, I have," was the justly proud reply. "But what do you want money—such a sum I mean—so suddenly for."

"For some one whom I love, for whom I would scratch the skies down if I could."

"An unhealthy sentiment, my dear boy. I could never consent to making money for such a purpose."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this," and Cave-Browne came and laid his hand on the other's shoulder, "that I wouldn't help you to that sort of money for such a purpose. I may be a ruffian but I have my limits and that's one of them."

"But she would never know!"

"How can you tell that? and if she ever did she would despise you."

The listener was silent. Cave-Browne continued.

"Yes, I know women, especially women reared as she has been, sheltered and guarded from every adverse wind. They are beautiful, they are charming, but they have no more heart or comprehension in them than a star has."

"Are you speaking of any particular woman?"

"No, Dallas, I'm talking of a type of which woman is a unit."

"You are wrong about their not having hearts. See how they love their children."

"So does the wolf, so does the cow. The love of children is no proof of the possession of a heart."

"Then what is?"

"Ah! so many things—first always of course the hurt and then the experience of the woe, of the want, of the misery that is around and about us in so many forms, so many phases. Such multitudinous assets go to the forming of

that abnormal thing a heart. But this is imbecile, here am I beginning to moralise when the only thing that is weighing on me is a most intolerable thirst. Come, Dallas, let us lunch together at the Savoy ! ”

“ Why the Savoy ? I thought you preferred the Café Royale,” Dunbar answered.

“ My dear fellow, how unobservant you are,” cried Cave-Browne as they went downstairs. “ Have you not noticed that I always choose my restaurants according to my moods.”

“ I never noticed it,” confessed Dallas as they reached the street.

“ I have always done so,” as a matter of fact.

“ How do you apportion them out ? ”

“ When I feel serene, happy, full of poetry and softness towards life in general I go to the Savoy and eat of seductive dishes, while the music and the wine steal through my veins warming me to the very eyelids.”

“ Well then if,” exclaimed his companion as he paused.

“ I feel as I conclude a stockbroker’s clerk does on Saturday—I lunch at the Trocadero and don’t even put cottonwool in my ears.”

“ That is plucky of you.”

“ Then on the very few occasions, my dear boy, when I experience the sensation of royalty incognito I patronise Claridges.”

“ I see.”

“ Lastly, when I imagine I am that best king of all, an American millionaire, I go to the Ritz.”

"It is surely a quaint idea."

"At least I hope it is original."

"I would probably no more than the idea of a double life is original."

"There is very little stimulus to be got out of a double life I assure you," exclaimed Cave-Browne. "Half a dozen lives is much more like it."

"How can that be managed?"

"Easily, dear innocent, easily and it does provide food for mind and body."

"I should imagine so."

"Yes," continued Cave-Browne with eagerness, "in my rainbow past I have frequently been six distinct men leading separate lives at one time; it is an art that I would like to teach you, Dallas."

"It might be amusing certainly."

"Amusing! it's absorbing, it renders you independent of friends, theatres, anything."

"Even money."

"No, money is necessary to the carrying out of it. You know everyone has a dual nature. It's an absurdly small allowance. Most of us, if we have any individuality at all, have at least four or five conflicting natures. The mistake is to try and suppress and control them as the good people do; indulge them all, I maintain."

"Really, Browne, I think you are the most immoral of men," Dallas told him.

"Shouldn't be surprised," was the cool reply.

"And when there have been six of you all at once, what were your favourite characters?"

"In one mood I would go to the very limit of everything. In another I was a stern moralist and a teetotaler, again I was a philanthropist and yearned, really yearned, for the regeneration of mankind. Anon I was an atheist, only to immediately become deeply religious. I was completely sincere in all and believed in myself, and consequently other people believed in me."

"You enjoyed yourself?"

"Enjoyed! why I used to positively hug myself in private to think of the many worthy people who sought me for my various personalities, and at the back of them all was just Cave-Browne. My dear fellow it's an entrancing subject, I could enlarge upon it for hours. But here we are," he concluded as the cab turned in under the archway leading to the circular courtyard.

The restaurant was crowded when they entered. They stood at the entrance while the ever courteous Gustave looked for a table.

Cave-Browne let his gaze wander leisurely over the animated crowd within. "There's Salutaris and the Baron and the man they call Rocky over in the corner," he whispered to Dallas Dunbar. "We can easily pretend not to see them. There is that pretty little girl from the Gaiety, what an awful bounder she is with," he remarked *sotto voce*.

Suddenly his eye came to a standstill.

"By jove, there is Prince Narischkine!"

Just then Gustave returned and piloted them to a cosy table in the shadow of the big screen. He remembered that Cave-Browne did not care for too much glare before three o'clock in the day.

"Who is Prince Narischkine?" enquired Dallas when Cave-Browne had ordered the luncheon and the wine.

"A Russian whom I used to know, who is enormously rich and lives only to gamble."

"Did you know him well?"

"I used to, intimately," was the reply given under cover of the strains of the overture from the "*Cavallieri Rusticana*," which that year was the rage. "I shall seek him out afterwards. And now, my dear fellow, we will do the two most delightful things in life: listen to good music and partake of better food," saying which Cave-Browne helped himself liberally to hors d'œuvres. Dallas took the hint and their meal proceeded in silence.

Meanwhile Morrison, the Baron and Rocky had left the restaurant, and were gathered together sipping coffee and liqueurs in the lounge at the head of the staircase.

"Well, boys, when are you thinking of going out of town?" enquired Rocky settling himself with elaborate ease.

"We haven't definitely decided," replied Morrison. "Do you happen to know of any good business, Rocky?" he added.

"Nothing definite," was the answer, "but Boston Brown dropped in yesterday."

"Yes, well?" the speaker was mildly interested.

"Tells me he has a brother in Mexico who is a member of the Jockey Club, says he could get you an invitation to join a special train from New York to run down to the City."

Here the Baron who had been paying little attention to the conversation sat slightly forward.

"Whose special train?" enquired Morrison in a fidgetty tone.

"A man who is building a railway down there is taking a lot of capitalists to see the line."

"I don't like those South American Republics," was the reply "dirt, disease, and revolutions while you wait."

"Ah! Morrison, but there is money there," murmured the Baron in a voice of dreamy anticipation.

"I don't think your last experience was very happy, my dear Baron, when you had to fly over the border," snapped Salutaris.

"You are cruel, Morrison, but it is the fault of all talented people," said the Baron pleasantly.

"No, my dear Rocky," resumed Morrison, "I am afraid that scheme would not suit."

"It's a pity, boys, a pity not to get the money of some of those dirty Mexicans."

"My dear man, I've been there," the other answered irritably, "and found that the account of their wealth and their City were alike grossly exaggerated."

"Well, I am surprised," murmured Rocky.

"I'm sure half of them would have to dig up the treasury to find a thousand pounds. You will have to exercise your brain a little more and to better purpose," continued Morrison. "I hate being offered wild cat schemes."

Rocky on whom heavy Burgundy and numerous liqueurs had induced indifference to all earthly affairs exclaimed, "Now, boys, I don't feel very well so I am going to cry off for the day and go back to the flat."

With much straining at the waist and difficulty he got on his feet.

"You shouldn't drink anything," Salutaris said tartly, "it always has the same effect."

"Well, Morrison," responded Rocky blandly, "I don't want to be rude, but apple pie and lager beer will soon mar your looks."

And then with a brief "So long" he ambled off with his usual camel-like gait and carriage.

"I'm very glad he has gone," exclaimed Morrison stretching out a fat jewelled hand for the creme de menthe, "I wanted another liqueur but would not encourage him by letting him see me take it."

"You think too much of others," said Von Kensig admiringly.

His friend modestly forebore to look at him. "What shall we do?" he asked abruptly.

The Baron did not answer for a moment, and Morrison looked up to find him carefully curling his moustache, his

eyes wandering longingly. Morrison was familiar with these signs so he exclaimed kindly,

"My dear Baron, you have gone such a hideous colour! Are you feeling ill?"

"Oh, Morrison," exclaimed the Baron in tones of deep reproach, "did not you see how she looked at me?"

"Of course I saw nothing of the kind," was the sharp retort. "As I have told you before I don't think these questions are even decent."

He helped himself to another liqueur.

"I am sure I have met her somewhere," murmured the Baron reminiscently.

"Kindly have some regard for my morals if you have none for your own," said Morrison rising, "but if you are going after strangers, Baron, you had better hand that cheque you have to me. I will go in search of Browne and hear what he has to say, Rocky is so lazy."

Von Kensig meekly handed the document over and without another glance in his direction Morrison minced away with his head well up and a fine air of detachment about him, more especially as he passed the lady upon whom he guessed Von Kensig had fixed his afternoon affections.

Just as the Baron was about to make a highly diplomatic move in the direction in which he desired to go, Cave-Browne, Dallas, and a tall and very elegant man with them barred his path.

"Delighted to see you, my dear Baron," exclaimed the

former genially. "Allow me to introduce Prince Narischkine Baron von Kensig." Then by some wonderful mental telepathy the speaker conveyed to the Baron what he wanted to say, and at the suggestion of the Prince they all sat down and ordered more coffee and liqueurs.

The Prince proved a charming companion and a very pleasant hour was spent, after which the Baron took his leave having extended a cordial invitation to Hay Hill.

This apparently in answer to the Prince's remark that he was quite a stranger in London, being over to dispose of certain gold mining rights and concessions, that he considered the English Clubs abodes of desolation as he could not get a game of baccarat in any of them, without which life to him was a dull and empty void. Whereupon Cave-Browne, after the Baron had responded to this lament, suggested they should all meet at five o'clock the next day, to which the Prince, having consulted his tablets, gave an unqualified consent, and then the party separated.

Cave-Browne and the Baron went together in one hansom towards Hay Hill.

"He is a member of the Czar's private Cabinet," the former told the latter as they drove along.

Salutaris, who was at home, listened with eagerness to everything about the Prince, with the light of battle in his eye. The three discussed the possibilities of the situation in all its bearings then Cave-Browne exclaimed,

"The only difficulty is that we must have enough men to make up the two tableaux. Good idea to invite

Lackington and offer him his revenge. It will have an excellent effect."

"I never want to see the creature again," cried Morrison, with a delicate shudder.

Cave-Browne gave his customary short laugh.

"Never mind what you wish or want," he answered, "but be diplomatic."

Morrison was silent. He felt annoyed.

"Can you get any others," asked the Baron.

"Yes, I think so," replied Cave-Browne. "I can bring one or two from White's, probably the secretaries and A.D.C. of Son Altesse will want to join, so that with himself, and ourselves we must have about eight. To make the game go well there shall be quite fifteen to twenty men."

"Really, Baron, that is the least of our troubles," said Salutaris, "I will have a crowd of gamblers already deep in the game before you arrive. They will play not quite such high stakes as the Prince, the only difference will be that they will pay for their counters with cheques, these may be drawn on the Bank of Elegance or perhaps the Sand Bank, while he will, I trust, give good bank notes for his."

"How will these Russian fellows behave, do you think, Browne?" he added with a supercilious air of enquiry.

"The Prince is a gentleman and the ways of gentlemen are somewhat alike all the world over," Browne told him coldly. "You must not mind if I ask you not to introduce any spring captains or men of the Major Rooke type.

And, by the way—how much do you give them for their time?”

Morrison began to simmer.

“I will choose my friends carefully, even if they fall short of the required number,” he replied calming his rising indignation in view of prospective profit. “Between them,” he added, “they shall have twenty-five per cent. of the winnings, leaving twenty-five per cent. each for you and myself.”

“Very well, that is agreed. I will get here about five o'clock with my crowd.”

Saying which the speaker took his departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUNCTUALLY at five o'clock the following day Prince Narischkine arrived with his two gentlemen, accompanied by Lord Glencare. This was proving an astonishing blow to his hosts. They had been preceded by Cave-Browne, Dallas Dunbar, Morrison, and the Baron, with several others, and had already started play, which the Prince lost no time whatever in joining.

The curtains were drawn and the lights turned full on, a big fire roared and crackled in the grate. The hum of distant traffic scarce reached them, yet the silence of the rooms except for quick indrawn breath or the shuffling of the cards was almost unbroken.

The Prince took a large sum in counters for which he omitted to give even an I.O.U. His staff staked small sums in notes and gold.

They all sat at the same side, while Cave-Browne with Lackington and a man he brought from White's took their places at the other table.

The Russians played far heavier stakes than the other players. The principal aide-de-camp carried with him a pocket book ornamented with a crown; this contained

the travelling expenses of the party. He made two levies on it and would in the excitement of the moment have made a third incursion had he not caught the eye of his chief and had visions of Siberia.

Several times the Baron was worried by the uneven play. The Prince's credit bets were so high that he felt constrained to win them if possible even if he did not draw a card against Lackington and the other man from White's. These latter were winning and giving their winnings a run.

It was simply giving away ready, and he did not feel at all sure that his noble guest would settle, when he came to watch him narrowly.

Morrison asked Browne to have a drink. Neither of them were playing so they walked together to the window.

"Do you think he is alright?" asked Salutaris in a very low tone.

"Don't know, he always used to be, but I confess I don't like his ways," was the answer.

"Lackington and your other friend have captured nearly all the ready money that has been lost. I shall give the Baron the office to go after some of that and let the Prince down a bit."

"That is a good plan," assented Browne. "When he owes about £6,000 tell your men to leave the game. I will then ask him to pay for his counters so that the butler can settle with the winners."

Morrison's men got up in due course.

"Prince, will you kindly pay for your counters!" asked

Browne coming forward. "Some of the Baron's guests, who have won more than is in the bank, are leaving. They will take away most of your losses."

"My A.D.C. will pay for me in the morning," was the calm response.

The Prince and Cave-Browne stood slightly apart from the rest of the group and their conversation was conducted in subdued tones.

"Your A.D.C. is here now with your money, Prince," the latter said, "and having brought you to this house I am naturally responsible for your losses, so kindly pay them."

Narischkine drew himself up to his full height. "I think not, Mr. Cave-Browne," he answered in icy tones. "I don't advise you to bother about them either. I quite remember Baron von Kensig now. He was caught cheating at the Mediterranean four years ago. I hear he plays poker even better." Cave-Browne went ghastly pale.

"Perhaps you had better say this to the Baron himself," he suggested.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders. "No," he exclaimed, "I shall simply leave. I want no vulgar broils with people of his class," then he advanced and embracing the company with the curtest of bows, he froze the Baron with a single look, and followed by his two gentlemen left the room and the place before anyone could prevent him or even understand. It had all passed so quickly that none of the others quite grasped the nature of what had taken place.

There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment. Von Kensig turned a pea green colour as he met Brown's meaning eye, while Morrison stood in an uneasy position by the fireplace.

"What did the Prince say?" exclaimed the Baron at last, with an air of innocence, adding: "Why has he left, and why has he not paid?"

Cave-Browne mindful of Lord Lackington and the other man who still remained, said,

"I am sorry to tell you that the Prince made a very grave accusation against you, Baron."

Then before the Baron could reply Browne leaned towards the others and said, "before going I wish to say that the game was perfectly fair, you agree with me, Lord Glencare?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I do," was the emphatic answer, Lord Glencare replied, coming forward and throwing his winnings on the table. "Come, Dallas," he cried, turning to Dunbar, "we will go."

And Dallas at a look from Cave-Browne rose.

"I shall not go with you unless you apologise to my friends," he said.

Glencare laughed.

"Then you will never go at least with me, my dear fellow," he moved towards the door as he spoke. Dallas strode towards him but none of the others moved.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Exactly what I've said. with this addition that I cannot

that a cousin of mine should be a cardsharper and a cheat." Lord Glencare towered over Dunbar.

"You're a liar."

"No, no, I'm not. Make way, please, and be good enough in the future to claim no acquaintance with me, otherwise I'll brand you in every Club and house in England. Because I am morally convinced that you are as one with this honourable and distinguished gathering."

Then Glencare thrust Dallas on one side and without a glance at the other occupants literally swept from the room.

Those who were left behind gazed at each other in speechless amazement. Morrison was the first to break the silence.

"Really, Browne, this is a nice state of affairs, it is with the greatest difficulty I have restrained myself from thrashing both Narischkine and the other."

"Of what use, Morrison?" murmured the Baron sadly, "we should have only had the police in."

"If you cannot exercise better judgment, Browne," pursued Morrison, furiously, "I think you had better not bring anybody, as for the Prince I never saw such a vulgar beast in my life. He is about as much a Prince as Von Kensington is a Baron."

"Hush, Morrison," entreated his friend, "your affection for me runs away with your discretion."

"The whole affair is simply disgusting," continued Salutaris savagely.

"Very disagreeable, certainly. The best thing to do is to

leave London for a while and go to Egypt," Cave-Browne suggested coolly as he gave himself a brandy and soda and handed another to Dallas who sat an almost frozen figure by the window.

"We shall certainly have to go somewhere; but it's all very well to advise going to Egypt. How on earth are we to get there?" Morrison answered ruefully. "Have you any solution, Baron?"

"Absolutely none, Morrison," was the convincing reply.

Then the party broke up in a curiously abrupt fashion all feeling amazingly uncomfortable.

"I'm ruined," Dallas Dunbar remarked as he and Cave-Browne went home together.

"Nonsense," was the impatient retort, "you will take a rest cure, then you'll return. It was of course very unfortunate that Glencare should have been present, but he won't say anything. It takes more than that to ruin a man."

Rocky was spending a festive evening with himself in Victoria Street when a note from the Baron arrived. It was a wet night without and he was preparing to make it a wetter one within, and had arrived at that state where drink always made him obstinate and morose.

He had not been made welcome in Hay Hill. In fact it had been plainly intimated to him that he was not wanted at anytime. . . . This had soured him, for he was firmly convinced that London contained few men so handsome, intellectual and brilliant conversationally as himself. Rawlings was indeed happy in self-love and self-admiration, even

believing that the way he continually hawked and coughed had a certain fascination of their own.

He read the Baron's letter again. "Ah, yes," he reflected.

It contained an urgent request for Rocky to go to Ravenscourt Mansions at once, or—if that were impossible—to call at Hay Hill in the morning to see the Baron alone.

"Aha!" thought Rocky, "I wonder what is up now! Once there is danger in the air it is only my tact and finesse that can really come to the rescue. Such is the strength of genius!"

Then he turned to the servant who was waiting, hesitated a moment—for Rocky was not generous—gave her a shilling and said:

"Mary—(he pronounced it Mur-ree)—you be a good girl and say I took Mrs. Rawlings out and you don't know when I will come in. And Mur-ree," he added, "when the man who brought this leaves, tell the hall porter that I am not in, no matter who calls."

"Good thing I've got a second bottle of whisky," he reflected when he found himself once more alone, "these unexpected letters play the deuce with a man's nerves. Why I feel almost sober. However, that's soon remedied.

Turning into Victoria Street in the morning he fortified himself with two Bromo Seltzers.

Then with a fine glow of excitement tinging his cheeks he repaired to Hay Hill.

The Baron was brief and to the point. Morrison was out

and the business was one that must be done in his absence, so that Rocky must not waste a moment.

Rawlings went straight to Madix, who happened to be stopping in a hotel in the Marylebone Road while his house was being redecorated, and in spite of the tearful remonstrances of the dear old gentleman, pulled him out of bed.

"It is impossible for me to go out for at least two hours," protested Madix, "you know my bath-room has a door on to the corridor. A lovely little woman who is just wild about me—not a day over twenty-three, so help me Moses—coming here at 9.30, directly after her husband goes to the City. Such a handsome fellow he is too, one of my best and oldest friends."

"She'll have to wait for you," said Rocky brutally, "she'll like you all the better for a little delay."

The old man wrung his hands but it was of no use. Rocky prevailed, and sleepy, dirty as Madix was, for he loathed water unless tempered with whisky, Rocky bore him away in a cab to Hay Hill. Madix had never met Baron von Kensig, had indeed never even heard of him. He had all the reverence of a Russian Jew for a title that he saw no reason to doubt. The surroundings impressed him to such a degree that his shoulders went almost over his ears as he bowed to the Baron. While Rocky stared coldly in response.

Von Kensig barked out, "Baron von Kensig requires some money immediately to settle his racing account. Can

you let him have £1,000 by noon? and what will you charge for it?"

"You know, Mr. Rawlings, I am always moderate in my charges, but I no longer do bills, only lend on securities in the first place at a very low rate." As he spoke his eyes wandered round the sumptuously furnished drawing-room, passed over the pictures, some of which were doubtful, and then settled on an easel of miniatures which to his trained eye were good for many times the sum wanted. "By noon, I don't see how it is to be done. To cover myself it would be necessary to verify the payment of the rent, go through the receipts for the bric-a-brac, and register a bill of sale. That would take three days and I should have to charge thirty per cent."

"Look here, Madix," cried Rocky, "have you got £1,000? Do it any way you like but do it at once and charge what you damned well please."

"Very well," said Madix "let me think."

Madix did not particularly want to think; he did want to observe the Baron, as like most of his race, he considered himself a good judge of men.

The Baron was not unconscious of being watched and moved about with a proud air well worthy of a larger stake. He was supercritical about Hollems' arrangement of the flowers and other small luxurious details that proved to be Madix's undoing, the Baron's magnificence impressing him enormously.

"Herr Baron, might I have two minutes' talk with you?"

"Yes, Mr. Madix."

"I can let you have £1,000 in notes now. My terms will be high. It is for you to accept or refuse. If you will sell me these miniatures for £1,000 I will undertake not to part with them for three months. At or before the end of three months I will give you my written undertaking to sell them back to you for £1,500."

"Do you want the frame?" Von Kensig asked, not wishing to have this disreputable looking old ruffian leave with a large parcel of a shape likely to excite suspicion in his opposite neighbour, or more important still, the mind of the porter. Such a small matter as forgery seemed beneath consideration.

"Baron, I have with me a Bank of England note for £1000, give me back £10 and I will forego the frame, Herr Baron."

The bargain concluded, Rocky was commissioned to change the note at a money-changer's office into French money and there purchase English bank notes for £500, so as to hide the transaction. His trouble was to be remunerated with £100, and for the exchange operations he was given £10 leeway. It seemed a pity to waste this, so he drove to the Bank of England, endorsed the £1,000 note in Von Kensig's name, and having purchased the necessary French notes, he returned to Hay Hill and settled his accounts with Von Kensig.

Sometimes the Baron was quite modest. He was so to-day. Rocky found him arrayed in a quiet travelling suit, a

portmanteau and some small pieces of luggage, including a very large dressing bag already packed, with these he left on the afternoon train for Paris telling his man to follow with the rest of his belongings with Mr. Salutaris. For the latter he left a brief note saying he had heard of some business and would stop at the Chatham where he hoped to see him the next day. In a postscript he recommended Morrison to send the keys of the flat to the house agent and better still to post them from Dover.

Salutaris came in for a late luncheon just after Von Kensig had started for Charing Cross. Some instinct led him to the case of miniatures; he had long had it in mind as a dernier resort.

Several times the Baron had suggested putting a bill of sale on the goods and chattels of Hay Hill, but this he had always laughed to scorn. Invariably at the back of his head, he had very much the same idea of stealing a march on his partner that the Baron had put into such practical effect.

Rocky's presence saved him from an attack of apoplexy, and together they sat down to one of the last meals either was likely to partake of in their present surroundings.

Rocky was artistically silent. He did not know what his grievance was, but he hoped that Morrison might feel some twinge of conscience for having seen so little of him during the past two months. His host responded to his mood, though inwardly conscious that all favours had been from himself to Rocky. After a pause and a very generous glass of sherry, he enquired,

"What have you been doing with yourself lately? I am afraid that Von Kensig and I have been making rather asses of ourselves here. The expense has been absurd."

"I suppose you are paying five hundred pounds a year rent? The furniture and other things must have cost you a lot too." Rocky knew all about the lease, but liked to put Salutaris on the rack. He dearly loved the loaves and fishes, and was thankful to be able, even at this late time, to give vent to his resentment at having been left out of the good things so freely distributed amongst those toadies who were always hanging round, and ready to flatter the matchless Morrison to the top of his bent whenever he had any money to spend.

In a measure, Rocky felt that he justified his existence so far as both of his friends were concerned. When in smooth waters they left him severely alone, but in stress of weather they invariably called on him for assistance. He rarely failed them. True, he always took care of himself. He did not pose as a philanthropist. He exacted brokerage for delicate work promptly carried out. By thus financing them, Rocky was to a great extent burning his boats behind him, for he always took the chance of damming up the channel he for the moment unloosened to relieve their temporary necessities. Between the group it would have taken an unusually mathematical mind to arrive at a fair balance.

Henry Rawlings thought of all these things, and realised

their full significance as he drank—he never sipped—a goblet of very dry Rhine wine. Morrison, as usual, was deeply concerned with himself and his immediate affairs. His metier was not reflection, and his pose was borrowed or stolen epigram, so that it was characteristic of him to repeat his question :

“What have you been doing with yourself lately?”

Rocky started as from a reverie.

“My dear Morrison,” he said, “I thought you boys had forgotten me till I received an urgent request from Von Kensig to come here this morning.”

“What about?”

“Oh, he asked me to do a little very personal business for him before he went to Paris.”

Rocky carefully wiped his gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and beamed like a benevolent penguin across the flower-laden table. Morrison was considerably annoyed. He wanted to know about the personal business, for he trusted nobody—not even the Baron—his comrade and confederate of the past five years.

Having vainly waited for Rocky to explain, or perhaps to give himself and Von Kensig away, he resumed his former plaintive monologue.

“We made a great mistake to hire this place for so short a time, thinking we could do any business here or establish ourselves. For what we have spent we could have had a small house in a decent position, furnished a couple of sitting-rooms, made our own bedrooms habitable, and

have had a permanent address, to say nothing of a home which in a year or two, with decent luck, would have always sheltered us at the same yearly price we now pay for a couple of weeks at a hotel."

Rocky's smile expanded disagreeably as he answered with a bark, "But, dear boy, this flat is larger than most houses, and is crammed with furniture. All you have to do is to move these things into any house that suits you. Leave it to me, Morrison; I know of a charming one in Curzon Street. A friend of mine has lent it to a lady with whom he is no longer friendly. She has gone abroad. You can take possession immediately. Let the lease remain in his name; send your furniture there. You need not pay your rent for a couple of years if it does not suit you."

Morrison held up his hand for silence and spoke with an approach to humility quite unusual to him.

"Possibly, Rocky, you are reasonable in rubbing it in. No doubt we have not played the game with you lately, though affairs between us have usually appeared to be quite on a commercial basis. You know as well as I that when I signed an agreement for this place at a ridiculous rent, I did not acquire the right or title to so much as a napkin in it, and that every farthing spent in it might just as well have been chucked over Waterloo Bridge."

"My dear Morrison," cried Rocky, with deep concern, "surely you had an option to purchase?"

"No suggestion of it."

"Then I am afraid you are in a very serious position—a very serious position indeed."

"Why?"

"Because Von Kensig sold the miniatures from the drawing-room to Madix for £1000 this morning, and left for Paris on the afternoon train."

"Good Lord! Do you know where he is putting up?"

"I believe at the 'Chatham.' He left a letter for you. Why not ask for it?"

Morrison made a convulsive dive for the bell, while Rocky meditatively picked his teeth. When Morrison had read the Baron's parting message he appeared more relieved, but decided to start after him in the morning. That night Rocky dined with him, both being joined by that cheery philosopher Bobbie Needall.

Rocky was in a morose mood, wrapped in a mental retrospective review of a purely imaginary golden past.

"What in hell are you thinking of?" asked Morrison, on whom many hours of Rocky's society began to pall.

"Nothing—nothing, Morrison only, perhaps in a few months I will be able to be a good and useful friend to you. I feel absolutely sick always to be entertained nowadays, I, who always had my table open to all my pals when I had my suite of rooms at the Walsingham House."

Silence.

Rocky had once stopped at the Walsingham House in Piccadilly for a week. While there he disposed of all his portable property before a visit to Carey Street. During

this time he had tendered a few scratch meals to men not accustomed to any kind of entertainment. He took care they should never forget it. Morrison had not been one of them, but felt sometimes as if he had been at them all.

"What are you brooding over?" now repeated Salutaris with a rising inflection in his voice. Your debts or your diabetes?

"If it interests you, Morrison, I have got hold of the rights, for Great Britain and all her colonies, of the finest patent I ever seen in my life. It will make me rich again." Rocky replied.

Morrison became immediately interested so much so that he even refrained from correcting Rocky's slight lapse in grammar.

"What is it?" he asked, "are you financed?"

"Practically I don't need any money, just two hundred pounds or three hundred pounds to cover initial outlay and about ten pounds a week for office and personal expenses. Of course any one will let me have that for a share in the business."

"But what is the patent?" persisted Morrison dreaming that perhaps the speaker's mythical successes of the past would be repeated.

"Quite a simple thing, like all great money-makers," rejoined Rocky, drawing slightly on his imagination, because he knew that there was no time for verification. He continued, "It is a machine into which you only have to throw tobacco and paper indiscriminately and then touch

an electric button which starts a rotary movement. This turns out cigarettes more perfectly rolled than hand made ones while the operator only has to retard or accelerate the movement of the machine to graduate the size. Both the trusts are bidding against each other for the exclusive right to use the machine in England, and for the last month I have been almost tempted to give in and sell out to one of them just for carrying on money."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Morrison, rising and going to the telephone.

When he returned to the dining-room he remarked graciously "Really, Rocky, it was hardly friendly of you to avoid the Baron and myself when you were in a hole. Surely men must stick together especially when their interests run parallel. I have asked Alfred Norman to come here after which he can draw a preliminary deed of partnership between you and I, the Baron will of course share with me. We will register ourselves as a small limited liability company because that looks better, meanwhile I can give you the two hundred pounds you mentioned as immediately necessary.

"Three hundred pounds and ten pounds a week in advance," Rocky barked like a broken winded mastiff.

Morrison hesitated, while a pale mauve colour spread over his face. Rocky knew this phase well and mentally called it "the extreme edge."

Throwing himself back with an impetuosity that seriously

strained his corset, he stretched out his hand with impulsive simplicity saying,

"Why, Morrison, two hundred pounds let it be then, you must know I would sooner go right plump to hell than drive a pal."

This was indeed true seeing that he had never in his life had a pal.

In due time Alfred Norman arrived accompanied by a stenographer. He dictated voluminous notes, took many contradictory instructions from both Rocky and Morrison, drank numerous brandies and sodas, purloined sundry cigars and a valuable snuff box, and left with these unconsidered trifles nestling snugly beside a nice little bunch of bank notes. These he astutely drew as an advance fee for the simple matter he had in hand.

Such was the genesis of the firm of Rawlings, Salutaris & Co.

A week later Rocky, feeling very proud, was installed in a brand new office, with full permission to do anything—or preferably anybody—that he could.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELEN WYVERNE was just completing her toilet to go to the play when the following letter reached her. She glanced at the clock on the dressing-table and saw that there was a good quarter of an hour before she need go downstairs, so she took it up and broke the seal with a strange sensation of foreboding at her heart.

This is what she read :—

“ MY DARLING.

It is many dreary days since the night of the ball. Forgive my silence, but I have been dreadfully worried. I have strained every nerve in every direction to try and bring to pass that of which we spoke together or rather what I spoke of and you said was impossible, and you were right, my beloved. It was a mad dream, born of the intoxication of your dear presence, your voice, your eyes.

Forgive me if you can, and please try to forget. I am a most unhappy devil, not worthy of an hour's thought from anyone, least of all from you.

You and I may not meet for some time, as I am leaving London for a little cottage away in Westmoreland belonging to my friend Eric Cave-Browne, of whom I think you've heard me

speak. There amidst the silence of the everlasting hills I hope to find once more my lost serenity and perhaps become more of a man and less of a thing. Good-bye, my very own. Think of me sometimes before your God, and remember nothing can alter the fact that I am

Your

DALLAS.

"Poor dear fellow, I wonder what the trouble is now," she mused and she sighed as she locked the letter carefully away and then taking her cloak and gloves went thoughtfully downstairs.

* * * * *

In the early days of April, when the first timid green buds were appearing on the trees in the parks and the crocuses thrust their pretty selves through the earth to the bleak, wind swept world above, the *Morning Post* announced to an astonished world that Lord Glencare was to marry Lady Henry Wyverne's daughter.

Lady Henry herself read the few lines many times with a glow of superb satisfaction and even contrived to forget for the nonce the many bitter moments she had passed through lately. Life smiled again to her. Lord Glencare, to her secret amazement, had proposed in London a month after the Hunt Ball, and Helen had behaved admirably, her mother could not but acknowledge that, though indeed what could any young woman with any semblance of reason see to object to in a handsome man with delightful manners and a perfect position.

Lady Cumberland had beamed her approval, while the old Duke had lost no time in writing to Alicia offering to give Helen her trousseau.

The news reached Dallas Dunbar in Cairo whither he and Cave-Browne had just arrived. Six weeks of country life and the mists of Westmoreland, the long evenings, the absence of all amusement, had rendered both sad and depressed almost to tears, so when Morrison and the Baron wrote offering expenses they accepted unhesitatingly.

Dallas was standing in the hall of the hotel reading the newly arrived papers when he came across the announcement, then having gone over it several times he went in search of Cave-Browne and told him that he wanted to go back to England immediately.

"What on earth for?" enquired that gentleman, who was enjoying a cigar in a secluded part of the verandah, "yes, I've heard the news, but what the devil good can you do, I'd like to know."

"But Glencare of all men, she must not. She cannot marry him," cried Dunbar helplessly.

"Why not? why not Glencare? Has not your aunt laboured in the matrimonial vineyard?" Cave-Browne inquired, adding, "and verily she has gained her reward."

"Oh, bother my aunt," ejaculated Dallas. "Think of that affair in Hay Hill. What will he tell her? He knows that he was cheated."

"My dear fellow, your morbid sensitiveness is getting too pronounced," exclaimed Browne impatiently. "You've

talked lately more like a woman than a person with some claims to be considered a man."

"But I'm so wretched, Browne."

"Granted, but you don't go the way to make matters better. When you rebelled at things in Westmoreland I put it down to the horrible loneliness which, if it didn't drive one to drink, as in my case, it was bound to turn to melancholia, but here we are now in Cairo and you are not any better," he continued scornfully.

Dallas Dunbar was silent, staring moodily out at the mysteriously entrancing landscape beyond.

"You don't know what it is to be in love," he muttered at length.

"No, and I don't want to," was the reply.

"Well, I shan't go away with you fellows to-morrow," Dallas said. "Good or no good I shall sail on the next P. and O."

"As you like," the other remarked indifferently.

"Anyway, I shall have the satisfaction of being near her."

"You would be far better away from London for some time," Cave-Browne told him. "It is true that Glencare has a good deal in his power at all the Clubs, and indeed everywhere else, and remember no man likes to feel that he's been made a fool of."

Dallas did not answer this though he mutely acknowledged the wisdom of it.

"You are far away from anything disagreeable here.

We're a very pleasant party, while to my thinking Morrison with his mincing ways and airs and graces is a perpetual comedy," observed Cave-Browne.

Dallas smiled faintly, evidently at some recollection of that gentleman.

"Yes," he murmured, "he *is* funny in some aspects I must admit." Then he grew gloomy again. "Nevertheless I must return, I must see her."

"But why, for God's sake."

"Oh! I don't know, Browne. I feel half mad. I only know that I must, that I *will* see her."

"To do what?"

"To make a dammed fool of myself, I suppose."

"That undoubtedly," ~~was~~ the laconic response.

* * * * *

It was the beginning of May, and London was very full, the weather being warm and bright and soft.

Helen and her mother were staying with Lady Cumberland, whose house was to be the scene of the marriage which was dated to take place in the beginning of the second week in June.

Dallas Dunbar was back at his own rooms in Park Lane, but so far as any chance of seeing or meeting with his cousin presented itself, he might have emained in Egypt.

She had never replied to his last letter, she had sent him no sign, made no mental sound of any kind. This he could not understand, and yet he could understand it.

He was restless, unhappy, undecided. He knew that he was powerless to alter anything and yet he desired to alter everything. He hated Glencare as he had never thought to hate anything that lived, hated him with the force, the conviction and the strength of a weak nature.

He had been back three days when he went into his Club for luncheon. The dining-room with its windows overlooking the Green Park was very full.

He recognised some old friends and several acquaintances whom he proceeded to greet cordially. Then he grew suddenly chilly. What had happened? what was it? His "How are you's?" were met either with the curtest of nods, the blandest indifference or the stoniest of stares. What *could* it all mean?

Dallas got to his own table somehow or other, and hurriedly ordered an appetizer just to gain time. His hand shook like an aspen leaf, the tables danced in front of him and the various figures at them multiplied to a surprising extent.

He stared miserably out at the passing people when they brought him his gin and bitters his teeth almost chattered against the thin glass. Mechanically he ordered his luncheon, and like a grinding machine he managed to swallow, hiding himself behind an evening paper in the intervals. One or two men passed his table and went on. Dallas experienced the most horrible sensation at the back of his head while his heart beat in great, thick, sick, uneven jerks.

What was this feeling of ice in the atmosphere, vague, indiscribable, yet there like a barrier?

He did not understand it, he told himself angrily, and yet he knew that he understood it only too well.

After luncheon he went out and walked westward. He thought the hall porter looked at him peculiarly as he left.

He shivered as the sunshine struck him with its genial warmth. At the corner of the turning by Bath House he encountered Glencare walking with his—Dunbar's—oldest friend, Ralph Lovelace, both looked him straight in the face and passed on.

* * * * *

The few days intervening between then and the wedding fixed for the tenth flew by. There was to be a large dinner party given by Lady Cumberland the night before to the near relations and a few intimate friends; the honeymoon was to be passed in Scotland; the presents were magnificent, so the papers said, and so Dallas Dunbar read down at his home where he had gone ostensibly to see his people, in reality to avoid his friends.

Dallas wandered about the park of his father's place morose, miserable, self-absorbed, or rode furiously along the country roads trying in vain to escape his maddening thoughts. His mother, a gentle lady, sympathised silently with his strange moods, and doubted not that she thoroughly understood the cause.

"Mother," he exclaimed suddenly one day, "if I or

any of your other sons did anything terribly dishonourable, how would you and the governor take it."

Lady Dunbar was quite frightened by his vehemence.

"My dear boy," she answered, "such conduct would be impossible for one of *us*."

"Yes, I know," he rejoined quickly, "but if it *were* possible for us?"

"But what kind of dishonour do you mean, my son?" his mother enquired feeling bewildered and afraid.

"Cheating at cards, for instance, robbing one's friends under the guise of hospitality," he answered with brutal frankness.

Lady Dunbar gave a little faint cry.

"How can you suggest such things, Dallas? They are too horrible."

"Yes, it is too horrible," he agreed gloomily, "yet it is done every day in the week."

"But never by gentlemen," his mother said sternly.

"No, by people who have ceased to be gentlemen and who probably at heart never were so."

"Ah!" Lady Dunbar gave a sigh of relief.

"What if a son of yours—" he began.

"A child of mine cheating at cards? Dallas, I am amazed, I am wounded beyond measure at your wild words. I would rather that the finest of sons lay dead at my feet before such a charge could be proved against him," Lady Dunbar concluded with a passionate intensity.

“Of course, of course, mother,” the young man cried alarmed at the indignation his words had aroused. “I was only testing you,” and he put his arms round her neck and kissed her trembling lips and coaxed her back to forgiveness and to smiles.

CHAPTER XV.

MEANWHILE, in gorgeous golden weather, a dahabieh went lazily up the Nile, well in front of another one on which latter were two Welsh landowners, gambling friends of Cave-Browne's, whom he had been carefully stalking for some weeks, wisely deciding that the illimitable silence of the desert would be a safer place for a game than noisy, crowded, talkative Cairo.

The languorous life on board the dahabieh suited Morrison and Cave-Browne to perfection, but proved very irksome to the Baron's restless habits. He loved exercise, excitement, activity, change. When ten days had passed in this sleepy drifting, he chafed audibly and constantly at the delay. As yet the Morgans' boat had not come in sight.

Von Kensig was one of those people who never read, lolling about the deck did not suit him, his enormous Havanas had gone off, as cigars do in Egypt. He did not care for cigarettes, which with him meant a few furious whiffs followed by a sore tongue. In sheer desperation he landed in the desert with the dragoman, whom he instructed to hire a camel and somebody to teach him in the gentle art of camelry.

At the end of a few hours he came on board again declaring that he felt as if he had spent a week on board a fishing smack in a heavy gale of wind. The exercise, however, gave him a splendid sleep that night, and for a while he sustained the monotony of the boat and refrained from groaning as much as usual.

One morning Browne noticed that his eyes were fixed on the pelucid water through which they were moving.

"What's the matter, Baron?" he asked, "you look as if you saw a ghost."

"I see them in hundreds, that beastly green water looks like all the mucks—mugs he meant—that thought me just the nicest fellow they *never* had seen till they refused to part. I am going to get another camel for a ride, it is better to be sore than sorry."

Just then Morrison made a tardy appearance. He looked and felt very liverish. Von Kensig's idea of a ride appealed to him, miserable travestry of a horseman though he was. The Dragoman stated that at a certain point he was sure of finding camels, but recommended that a good breakfast should be eaten first if they would care for a long stretch over the desert with a rest in an oasis.

"You won't care to join us I suppose, Browne?" asked Morrison in his most approved and supercilious manner. "Unless one is accustomed to riding it knocks one out and even I am not altogether sure of myself when it comes to a camel."

There was just the suggestion of a smile on Cave-Browne's

face as he declared he would like to be of the party, and asked the Baron what start he would give him for five pounds.

Before replying the Baron looked him up and down and decided that he was a somewhat hard-bitten specimen.

"I never bet," he replied, "unless of course it is an absolute certainty for myself."

"Have you any riding kit with you, Browne?" enquired Salutaris.

"No, old man, the only pair of breeches I possessed were pawned five years ago."

"If you are not going to have a bet, I may as well do so. I might get back something of my own that is now reposing in your pocket."

Morrison sneered as he spoke, while Browne hesitated as to whether he should throw something at his head. Commonsense and a strong control of a peppery temper prevailed.

"As you so delicately suggest, Morrison, the only fifteen pounds I have about me I received from you. I am not likely to forget it while you are about. What will you stake against them for a fair match between us to a given point?"

"If you are anxious to make me a present, Browne, I will take fifty pounds against your fifteen pounds cash up with Von Kensig."

"Done, Baron, here is my fifteen pounds. Cover it, Morrison."

Morrison staked his fifty pounds and retired to make an elaborate equestrian toilet. In course of time he reappeared, a fantastic figure arrayed in hunting breeches and blutcher boots, carefully chosen stock, fastened with a hunting crop pin of doubtful diamonds, Panama hat and square-tailed black and white check coat. The tail gaped a bit, and Browne remarked,

"Thank heaven, Salutaris, you are so personal that I don't mind saying you are the horstiest man on foot I have ever seen. I hope you are not equally footey on horse, but—but as we are alone it does not matter, only really, my dear fellow, I never imagined anything so indecent as your figure in leathers looming out from under that beastly slop coat you are wearing."

Morrison disguised his fury, for he was one of those happy people who thought that a quantity of the cheapest garments would pass him even among the initiated as a well dressed man. He looked at Browne, it struck him that the latter's flannel trousers though old and not over clean were particularly well cut and that his clothes were made in a manner to sit correctly whatever his attitude. Morrison's coats had a beastly habit of rising above his large ears while he happened to be standing bolt upright.

"Why do you fellows always want to fight? Why not call the bet off?" exclaimed the Baron.

Very late and saddleworn Morrison made camp that night. He did not like loosing his bets, but still less

pleased was he to find Cave-Browne comfortably stretched by a fire talking volubly with two swarthy warriors who had served under him for three years in the Camel Corps, a fact that he had carefully concealed at starting. Morrison declined dinner and retired to his cabin.

Early next morning Sidney Morgan's dahabieh was reported in sight.

The cook was instructed to be prepared in case Morgan and his friends would come on board for luncheon. Browne and Morrison put off in a small boat and remained for a light breakfast inviting the party to lunch with them. The invitation was accepted gladly, there having been a breakdown in the commissariat of the Morgan contingent.

When the Baron heard the news the light of the coming fray kindled in his eyes while the deadly inanition of the past few days faded into nothingness. He went to his cabin, took out a new pack of cards, bowed to an imaginary opponent, shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, opened the pack, counted the cards, shuffled them, handed them over to be cut, made a huge bet with himself, played game after game in the most artistic manner, only winning those on which his bets were largest.

After a while Browne and Morrison entered to find this exciting pastime in progress. Browne laughed at sight of the Baron, while Morrison's limited sense of humour was distinctly tickled. He said,

"For heaven's sake, Rudolph, don't exhaust your luck, because we shall probably have a real game to-night."

They both laughed slightly at the sally.

The luncheon was excellent and well suited to the climate, a very light "brut" champagne was much appreciated. With little persuasion the visitors were induced to come back for dinner also.

In the cool of the evening various games of cards were indulged in for small stakes. Ready money passed freely but something had gone wrong with Von Kensig. Several times when he intended to give a strong hand to Morrison or Browne it reached Morgan until when play ceased the confederates were out of pocket some two hundred pounds in cash.

As Morgan was going to his own boat he said, "I never saw such extraordinary luck as I had to-night, Von Kensig, or anyone so persistently lose his larger bets as you. When may I give you your revenge?"

"You are very kind," replied Von Kensig, "I certainly should like to have another go at you. Shall we say to-morrow or the next night? To-morrow then."

Day after day play continued.

Egypt the illimitable, the marvellous, the entrancing, did not exist for them.

A pack of painted cards were preferable to the Pyramids.

Morgan had no further cause to congratulate himself on his good luck. He had but little ready money with him, and that soon went. Sad to narrate his two friends who occasionally made small bets almost invariably won, with the

result that when Cairo was again reached they between them retained the two hundred pounds lost by the Profession as well as Morgan's ready.

On the other hand Morgan owed three thousand pounds to Cave-Browne, twelve thousand pounds to Salutaris and thirty thousand to Von Kensig.

The night before arrival he discussed the matter with Cave-Browne, beginning :

"This loss hits me pretty hard, Eric, it is no use reflecting what an ass I was not to pull up sooner. Well, well, Salutaris will have to take half what I owe him in a month and the Baron ten thousand at the same time. You can have a monkey now, I will give you a cheque for it in Cairo, and the other two thousand five hundred pounds you must use as a betting credit during the season. If I am not on the spot you can give my name."

Cave-Browne reported the conversation, but said nothing about the betting credit which suited him perfectly well. What he said was:—

"Of course we will divide all money as it comes in, knowing me so well—although my amount is the smallest—Morgan is likely to keep me waiting. By the way, it is a great pity you fellows insisted upon taking so much in spite of what I told you. He would have paid fifteen thousand pounds practically at once."

"Then why doesn't he do so now," snapped Morrison, "we are perfectly willing to take it on account."

"Why don't you tell him so? He will make his ar-

rangements with you in person. He has not asked me to say anything, I only tell you so that you may know what to expect. You will have three days for your settlement before Morgan leaves Cairo to join his yacht."

Salutaris was growing sulky, although this was by far the best coup he and the Baron had ever made, and he felt quite sure the money would be paid. He had, however, been able to make no headway with Morgan or his friends socially and hated to see the easy terms Cave-Browne stood on with all of them.

"Look here, Browne," he said irritably, "you give far too much advice and put on much too much side considering all the circumstances. If your friend Morgan is such an outsider that he loses more than he can pay at once, I don't trust him or his promises. The Baron and I are men of the world, and know that you are only trying to make yourself solid with Morgan by telling him that your little lot can stand over. Play your own game with your own pals but remember that it does not go down with us. Each man must collect for himself. When everything is paid it shall all be divided. You will get your exact share after all we have advanced you has been taken out. Moreover, you will have to find your own way back to England, unless of course you wish to turn camel driver again, which may suit you better."

"Baron," said Browne, "I am sure you won't agree to such a beastly unsportsmanlike proposition as this, will you?" He turned to Von Kensig for support.

"I always leave the settlements to Morrison, but why can't you make Morgan settle in full, then we can divide at once," replied the Baron.

"Why not propose at once that I should tell Morgan that I am in the cutting up stakes," said Browne with a short laugh. "He would then be sure to pay and that without enquiry. No, before we drop this discussion you fellows must agree to do the square thing by me and I will do all in my power to see that you get your money."

"It is useless to say any more," Morrison remarked, only too delighted to get back a little of his own from Cave-Browne. "As I said before each must collect for himself and when all is paid we will divide, and till then each man must look out for himself."

Before arriving in Cairo, Morgan came on board, told Salutaris and Von Kensig what he would do, and when they pressed for more money down and bills for the balance, regretted that he could not accede to their request, and finally clinched the matter by saying he alone knew his own financial affairs and these he absolutely declined to discuss with anyone.

Everybody went to the same Hotels as before, and that night Cave-Browne dined with Morgan and his friends. After dinner they went into the hall at the Savoy for coffee and to listen to the band.

This was not all they heard, much to Cave-Browne's horror.

In the middle of the hall, which was extremely crowded,

stood a very irate lady with an extremely loud voice. She was speaking to Morrison and Von Kensig, who vainly tried to escape or to be allowed to reply.

"I am astounded at your effrontery in coming here, you are simply a miserable pair of cardsharps, but you shall not rob anyone in Egypt. After you cheated my husband in Caux he enquired about you and found you were both well known to the police of Europe. He will see you are deported." The speaker made no attempt at concealment.

"But you must be mistaken," Morrison stammered miserably.

"In what way?"

"Our identity."

"I don't think so. I believe you to be Mr. Morrison Salutaris, the son of an English General, and this man who describes himself as Baron Von Kensig to have been a waiter—when honest enough to work—but later a convict. Am I right?" At this point Morrison and the Baron swung round and beat a most undignified retreat.

Morgan had heard every word. He left where he was sitting, and approaching the lady he said,

"Madam, if you will pardon my addressing you, I should deem it a great favour if you would put this information at my disposal. For some days past I have been playing with these two—er—er—people on board their dahabieh. After the first night my luck was marvellously bad and I now owe them a very large sum, part of which I was going to pay

them to-morrow. I am a Welshman, we all know what Taffy was, perhaps that is why I—more than most people—would dislike to pay when I had no chance to win.”

“You shall certainly have the information to-morrow,” was the quick reply, “the chief of police shall bring it to you.”

“Allow me to give you my card,” replied Morgan, bowing, “as you have probably never heard of me, I may mention that my yacht is now lying in the Sherif basin at Port Said.”

The interview and active unpleasantness was apparently over, as everyone stood well aside to allow Morrison and Von Kensig to go to the former's apartments if the manager had not already closed them, when a small Egyptian, in great excitement, darted in from the street upon the scene following them down the corridor.

“Aha!” he screamed, “so you are back, Mr Morrison Salutaris, and where is my thousand pounds, you fat pig-faced thief. You give me shares to sell by cable for nearly three thousand pounds. You so clever you only draw one thousand pounds. You know your shares no good, London Stock Exchange won't accept vendor shares. I go now to magistrate, he giving you five years to think of some easier, safer way to swindle another honest banker. You in Cairo now, Nile seeing you no get away before morning, happy dreams.”

The little man went shaking his fist and gnashing his teeth with rage.

"This is edifying," said Morgan to his guests, "suppose we go up to my rooms, the atmosphere may be clearer than down here."

Mortified and apprehensive, Cave-Browne had turned and was walking to the smoking-room, when Morgan called out cheerily, "Come along, Eric, you must help us to decide what's to be done."

Arrived in his sitting-room Morgan said, "Of course, Browne, I am quite satisfied that you are just as much taken in as we are; as a matter of curiosity how and where did you come across these beauties, and why did you come here with them?"

Cave-Browne's spirits returned as he replied,

"Came across them racing last year, and was able to put them in the way of winning a good deal."

"Oh, that was it."

"Yes," continued Browne. "When 'Hackler's Pride' won the Cambridgeshire they must have had a good win, because they insisted upon giving me five hundred pounds, and then the other day when they found I had not kept my winter's corn they asked me to come out here as their guest."

"Oh, I see. Have any of your other friends played with them?"

"Not a soul, they have not played with anyone, to my knowledge, since we left England."

"Well, anyhow, I don't see why I should pay these sweeps thirty-seven thousand pounds. What do you fellows

think?" he appealed to Browne, who exclaimed after a slight hesitation,

"Naturally not, Morgan. It is deuced awkward for me though as I have about three hundred and fifty pounds of their money—and blackguards as they undoubtedly are—I don't believe they would take it back."

"That certainly is unlucky," allowed Morgan, "because if I repudiate it will look more as if we had taken them on. In any case I shall pay you three thousand pounds to-morrow. Of course they looked upon you as the goose who laid the golden eggs, and allowed him to win, and even then the account is very unsatisfactory, because they evidently had enough sporting blood to take the chance of prison to entertain us, and by jove it must have cost them a good deal, and very well and unostentatiously they did it."

"It is uncommonly good of you to pay me," Browne interposed, "I have been very stupid not to find out about these men before introducing them to you. After all, though, when racing I hardly do anything else, one is very apt to act on Admiral Rous' axiom 'on the turf and under the turf all men are equal.' However, as I nearly let you in and have been living at their expense, it will seem about right if I make up anything of this one thousand pounds that Salutaris may be short, what do you say?"

"No, Eric, I will pay that one thousand pounds. You of course must quit them. The best plan will be to take the early morning train to Port Said, go straight on board

the yacht, finish our cruise with us, and get back to England in time to blow in your oof racing."

So the matter was settled.

Twenty-four hours after Cave-Browne left Cairo, Morrison and the Baron followed him. They found him smoking a very large cigar—belonging to Morgan—on one of the upper balconies of the Eastern Exchange, opening out of which they had secured a sitting-room :

"Come in here, Eric," said Morrison quite genially, "we may as well divide as the whole matter is over."

"Divide nothing," said Browne, "and by the way, Salutaris, I am not and never will be Eric to you."

"But, my dear fellow, you have received three thousand pounds and we one thousand pounds. Now we will deduct the expenses of the dahabieh, and the money we have lent you, and whack up the balance."

"Salutaris," said Browne, "to quote yourself it is no use arguing, I will give you back what you lent me and pay my one third of the dahabieh. To quote you against yourself again you decided that each man was to collect for himself, and when everything was paid everything should be divided to that ruling I will stick."

Morrison turned a sickly colour.

"Of course I had no idea you were quite as thick as you are otherwise even I might have declined to come."

Saying which Cave-Browne called for his bill and prepared to make a start for Morgan's yacht from which the last coal lighter had already come away. He had been watch-

ing her getting up steam for the last hour or so. When he had settled his bill and was just leaving, a telegram forwarded on from Cairo was put into his hand. After he had read it, he went cold all over and sank into a chair close by, crumpling the message up in his hand.

When he had recovered himself a little he called a servant and said,

"Put my luggage aboard the mail boat and label it for Marseilles."

CHAPTER XVI

It was the night but one before Helen Wyverne's wedding. There was a large dance to be given at Lady Derbyshire's house in Piccadilly, a house particularly adapted for such an entertainment from the fact that it had a large rambling old-fashioned garden at the back.

Lady Derbyshire was very well known in the London social world, and though some one had been known to say that she was like an iceberg illuminated by a farthing rushlight still invitations to anything that she gave were much coveted.

This was to be a ball principally for young people. All the Guardsmen and any other really energetic dancing men were included, not omitting, Dallas Dunbar. An invitation at this particular juncture loomed as something like an event to him, for the salver that once upon a time had been piled to a respectable height had become very different latterly in bulk and appearance.

He turned the silver embossed card over and was strongly tempted to go, but resisted it.

Helen would be there and so would *he*. Dallas Dunbar was not going where he would be called upon to look upon

those two together. He had quite determined to see his cousin once again, if it was only for the very last time, but not in a crowd—never in a crowd. After that he would say farewell to the old slough and leave England. He was so sick of it all.

He sat and ruminated on that evening in June, while the summer twilight crept across the park and the ever ceaseless whirr of the traffic passed up and down Park Lane.

The noise, faint, muffled as it was, made his head ache. He longed for freedom, for great space, with nothing between himself and the horizon. To be away in a primitive world free from the old trammels, prejudices, conventionalities; yes, that would be good, it would be more than good, and it would make for everything higher and better. Like a snake he would be able to cast his skin; but would he have the moral courage to do it, that was the question.

He rose and moved about the room restlessly. To-morrow would be the last day of her freedom. How could he communicate with her—how? That was what obsessed him.

There was to be a reception after the dinner to-morrow night; he knew that because he had read it in *The Post*.

Could he ask her to slip out in the midst of it? No, of course not, all the servants would see and wonder and whisper. But to-night from the dance, she could let

herself out by the garden entrance in the wall and be back again before she was missed.

His heart quickened its action at the thought, but then again would she come? Did she care enough still? Never mind he would write and risk it.

He sat down at his table and taking a pen he said :

"I must see you. Will you come to the garden entrance of Derbyshire House to-night at 12 o'clock? I will be waiting. I shall not go to the dance. You can guess why,

DALLAS."

Then he rang for his man and told him to give that into Miss Wyverne's own hand, or failing that, her maid, but to no one else.

"I quite understand, sir," was the servant's reply, as indeed the faithful Baines did only too well.

He returned in about an hour.

"Miss Wyverne was just stepping out of the carriage, sir, as I reached the door, so I handed it to her myself."

"Good," answered Dallas.

He dined alone. It was not likely she would or indeed could send any reply.

He was feverish with anxiety as he waited the slow passing of the time. He could not sit still, he could only speculate and hope and doubt one after another or altogether. He ordered dinner, which was a farce, and drank a good deal of wine to steady his jumping nerves. He did his best to fix his attention on a book or a paper

and failed miserably. As the clock struck eleven o'clock he rang the bell, and when it was answered,

"I shall not want you again to-night, Baines. I don't know what time I shall be in, very late I expect," saying which he went to his bedroom to change.

* * * * *

It was a quarter after midnight, and the vast suite of rooms at Derbyshire House were thronged when Helen Wyverne, looking very pale, whispered to her mother that she thought of slipping away as she had a headache and felt dreadfully tired.

"You can make my excuses," she added, "and in this crowd no one else will miss me."

Lady Henry shrugged her shoulders, she felt annoyed, but deemed it prudent to offer no particular opposition.

"Very well, dear," she agreed a trifle ungraciously.

Helen went through the reception rooms and down the broad stairs. Everyone was apparently in the back room. It was very sultry and the lace scarf that she carried promised sufficient protection.

Her heart was going furiously as she passed into the garden, where electric bulbs glowed round the flower borders, and figures moved here and there, sometimes in the light and again in deep shadow.

Helen followed the narrow path that ran by the side of the wall, stopping at the postern gate on the right. She moved the bolts with difficulty and cut her fingers endeavouring to turn the rusty key in the lock, which

yielded at last. The gate opened and she and Dallas stood face to face.

"You darling!" he exclaimed rapturously.

"I can't remain long, supposing anyone was to see us," Helen replied drawing the gate to behind her and looking fearfully up and down the street which apparently held no one but their two selves and Dallas' waiting hansom.

"Come," he said taking her gently by the arm and leading her to the cab, "there is nothing to fear, you and I will go to my flat and steal just one last half hour together."

He stepped in after her and closed the flap doors.

"How did you manage to get away?" he enquired as the cabby turned round and they rattled off towards Piccadilly.

Helen shrank into the corner as they passed the lighted front of Derbyshire House where the carriages were coming and going with bewildering rapidity, then she told him.

"Then you have plenty of time," he cried happily.

"No, I must get home in an hour," she answered.

"Nonsense," he told her, "I've got you, I'm not going to yield you up for ever so long."

"Now, Dallas, you mustn't make me regret coming."

"Darling, I'm your slave," he murmured fondly.

Once in his sitting-room where subdued amber shaded lights fell on the gay chintz, the oak panelling, and the few small good pictures, Dallas placed his cousin in a high-backed old-fashioned chair, and then came and knelt at her feet and laid his fair head down on her lap.

"Helen, Helen," he whispered, "how awful it is for me. Do you ever think of that?"

"Poor man," she murmured as she stroked his hair with a compassionate tenderness, "and don't I suffer a little too?"

"Then you do care," he cried passionately as he looked up his face streaked by two tears. Helen looked away, her breast heaved. The light fell upon her and on the third finger of her left hand where one great diamond glowed and sparkled the outward symbol of her coming bondage.

"Then, my beloved, don't go through with it," he entreated with his arms around her.

"I must, I must. Everything is arranged I cannot draw back—I cannot."

"If you really cared you would," he said reproachfully.

"But dearest, dearest, how should we live? Darling, don't let us go over the old well-trodden ground again."

"Forgive me, dear, forgive me, I'll promise not to offend again."

He rose to his feet and went to a table on which stood some decanters. Filling one glass with claret he brought it across and begged her to drink it. For himself he mixed a brandy and soda somewhat unsteadily.

"Helen," he asked after a pause, and he came and stood by the mantelpiece where he could see her best, "do you feel happy about the future?"

"Happiness is a big word."

"It's the only word worth conjuring with."

"I think I'm fairly content, Dallas," she answered after a second thought, while the diamond on her hand shone and glinted and sparkled, and took on a thousand new tints against the ruby of the wine.

"I hate the man you are going to marry," he said presently, and there was such a malignant tone in his voice that startled the listener. She looked up almost in alarm.

"Oh! Dallas, you mustn't say that, he hardly deserves it."

"I do say it, and what's more I mean it. He is the greatest enemy I've got, and by Heaven I'm going to be even with him yet."

"Dallas," his cousin exclaimed, "what are you dreaming of? Glencare your enemy. He has never even spoken of you!"

"He would be ashamed to mention my name to you after all the injuries he has done me," the young man cried inconsequently.

"Dallas, this is your imagination. It could not be."

"It can be, it has been," he declared passionately. "He has deliberately circulated disgraceful stories about me, people have cut me in consequence, as if it was not enough to have taken you away," he ended miserably, resting his head wearily on his hand.

Helen Wyverne rose and came and put her arm caressingly round his shoulders, and laid her dark head against his golden curls. She was infinitely distressed,

infinitely sorrowful, and filled with a nameless, impatient foreboding that surged within her like a rushing river.

"Dallas, you wound me dreadfully saying these things, because they can't really be true," she murmured.

"They are, I tell you," he muttered.

"I think worry has made you imagine that people don't wish to see you."

He gave a hard laugh.

"Worry, worry," he echoed, "perhaps so. God knows it plays hell with anybody." Then he turned suddenly and caught her in his arms, and held her there as in a vice. "It's your loss, my angel," he cried with a sob, "your loss that has taken my sanity from me."

"Don't say that, dear. I can't bear it."

"Then come away with me to-night, marry me to-morrow. I have £500 a year and I suppose I can work." His face and voice held a wild eager hope.

She shook her head.

"No, Dallas, I'm too fond of both of us to consent." His arms insensibly slackened their hold. "I'm not made of the stuff from which they fashion heroines," she pursued. "I love you, the fact that I am here proves that, but I cannot marry you." He looked at her and his sight grew dim. He felt as if something, everything was slipping from him.

"And is that your final answer?" he asked at last very slowly.

"There can be no other."

There was a long silence filled only by the ticking of the clock which seemed to have increased in sound from some unaccountable reason. Helen glanced at it, it was on the stroke of 1.30.

"I must go," she said, "mamma will be growing so nervous."

"Oh, let her," he answered rudely, "do you think I worry about how she feels?"

"Apparently not," Helen answered coldly, "but I must."

"I'm frightfully rude, you must forgive me," he exclaimed with compunction.

The tears were trembling on his cousin's curled lashes as she looked at him. They were young, the world and its futility was as yet a sealed book, above all they loved one another and they had to part. To Helen that seemed to sum up all of unhappiness that life could give or know.

"I'm going now, Dallas," she said slowly and sadly as she wound her long lace shawl about her, "won't you wish me happiness?" she added wistfully.

"No. I am too mean and selfish ever to wish you happiness away from me," he told her.

"That seems a little hard."

"It is, it is, my own; but I am a brute, and some day soon I expect you'll know it." He came nearer and took her once again in his arms and kissed her with a mournful and passionate tenderness. "Thank you for coming,

my angel," he murmured, "I shall always remember this hour always, and now—" He broke off abruptly and pushed her almost roughly towards the door. "Come, while I have the strength to send you from me."

He put his cousin into a cab and stood watching till it turned round Hamilton Place, then he went back upstairs and flinging himself into a chair sobbed long and hopelessly just as a woman might.

* * * * *

Lord Glencare sat in the boudoir of Madame St. Clair's house in West Chapel Street, a room all azure and purple with embroidered satin walls where lillies of the valley and quantities of pale roses in vases breathed out their fragrance to the night that lay beyond the windows opening on the balconies. Madame St. Clair was seated on a low sofa, the shaded light shimmered on her crocus yellow gown, a butterfly of emeralds sparkled on her left shoulder that gleamed pale and polished as ivory. Glencare looked at her from where he stood on the hearthrug till his eyes grew dim. If by any chance he ever had loved any woman this was the woman, this lady leaning back with a slight smile on her mouth and a look of complete indifference on her face, a woman who combined with a languid loveliness all that supreme charm of the world and its highest form of culture.

She met his glance.

"You are silent, my friend," she said, "silent and more than usually serious."

"An unpardonable combination surely!" Lord Glencare exclaimed, rousing himself "let me give you a cigarette."

"And how do you feel now that the hour glass runs low," she asked, after a slight pause.

"You should be the last person to ask me that," was the reply.

She blew a thin curl of smoke into the air and dispersed it with her hand.

"Do you know I was hoping you would invite yourself here to night, Glencare," she commenced softly.

"Why?" he asked, "why?" He came and took a chair close to hers.

"Because I wanted to answer your letter in person, you know I never write. I am not like other women."

"Another of your all-conquering charms," he murmured, and he took up her great fan of white ostrich feathers and passed his fingers lingeringly over its perfumed softness. "And—and what else my lady of flames and of roses."

Madame St. Clair laid aside her cigarette and leant her cheek upon her hand. "I want you to sweep me from your memory from now onwards," she said abruptly.

"You ask what no man could render."

"What one man must. Glencare, you and I have been very good friends, have we not?"

His eyes answered her.

She continued. "To-morrow you marry a beautiful girl—"

"From ennui, from caprice and only because you—"

"The world takes on a different aspect. The past must become a dream, the future a reality," she pursued not heeding his interruption.

"I have always hated realities," he said, still caressing the fan.

"Nevertheless they form the largest part of life."

"And the ugliest."

"To return," she continued, "I am going abroad to-morrow, and when I return I want to find that you have obeyed me. It will not be difficult."

"I will obey you all my life if only now—it's not too late—you will take back your 'no' and marry me," he said.

She shook her head till the diamonds between her breasts emitted a myriad of acute fires.

"Impossible, impossible; have I not said so always."

"To my eternal pain, yes, you have."

"I will never marry again, never," Madame St. Clair pursued. "Any chain galls me, that of matrimony most of all, and for domesticity and for children I have no love."

"So you have always said."

"I offered to be your friend."

"That did not content me, I desired you altogether and for ever."

She smiled slightly, a dubious, mournful smile. "For ever," she echoed, "ah! my dear, how long is for ever in our world—a day, a month, perhaps a year."

"You do not care, you have never cared!" he exclaimed, "and before indifference the gods themselves are helpless."

"I cared once."

"For me," he asked, "for me?"

"No, not for you, for some one who passed out years ago."

"I knew it," he exclaimed, "I knew it, you have only smiled at me, been kind and indulgent as you might to a little dog. Sometimes I think I shall see your smile even in my grave."

He rose and resumed his place near the mantle-piece.

"I suppose there are some women who only love once," he remarked ruminatingly, "and afterwards—"

"Afterwards we live for our intelligence, or our intrigues, or our charities, but for a great passion never any more," she told him.

"And in what category would you place our friendship?" he enquired with bitterness.

"As a delicious indiscretion," she answered, "a vague and visionary attachment, the embodiment of a possibility, a gracious and graceful memory, anything—everything that is charming."

"I only know that I have reached the stars with you, so at least I owe you an eternal gratitude," he said gazing at her with sad covetous eyes.

He now saw in this woman what perhaps in all the time he had known her he had never seen before, and through his habitually languid veins fire ran.

Desire seemed to grip his heart and fill him with a divine delirium, and on the morrow, nay, in a few hours he was to be married to another. It seemed impossible.

He felt himself grow pale—pale with passion and with longing—the silken curtains gave a slight throb like a human breast, the stars glittered without and the lights swayed; caressing whiffs of air entered stirring with gentle touch the chalices of the flowers and disturbing the hearts of the roses.

The clock struck the hour of three—obeying an irresistible impulse born of the soul—of the heart of the senses he suddenly cast himself down on the sofa beside her. It was one of those moments that rarely have any return. Before he even knew it his hands had sought her, touched her, enveloped her, drawn her close to him, found pleasure in the resisting contact of her body in the suggestive warmth of her flesh.

“Let me love you!” he cried and his voice was strangled in his throat. “Don’t shrink from me, we are not boy and girl but man and woman. Let me love you, let me be united to you for one hour, give me something to carry into this unknown future of mine.”

* * * * *

It was Helen Wyverne’s marriage morning. Helen sat in the big, old fashioned bedroom of the house in Berkeley Square, while the sun played on the sumptuous litter of the dressing-table with its cut glass and gold toilet things and heaped up cards, notes, flowers and other countless trifles. On the great wide bed lay her wedding and travelling gowns,

while the boxes and trunks stood about in all directions. Helen, wrapped in a muslin negligé, sat alone in front of the square mirror swinging in its setting of fine wrought steel. She held a letter in her hand, and she was more than ordinarily pale. A breeze, warm and soft as a caress, came from under the lowered sun blinds and stirred the ribbons at her throat, bringing the scent of summer from the world without.

The clock recorded eleven strokes, the ceremony was to be at 2.30. She had ample time as yet for everything. She read the letter once, twice, thrice, going over some of the sentences oftener as if desirous of committing them to her memory for ever. Then she burnt it over a silver spirit lamp.

It had come by hand early that morning. Inside it had been a white velvet box no bigger than a cob nut, within that had been a single pearl set on a gold wire. It was a lovely pearl—a pearl that when the sunbeams caught it held all the colours of the sea. Helen took it in the hollow of her hand and gazed at it, while a hot, wild, miserable feeling gathered under her eyelids.

The words accompanying it were :—

“Accept the enclosed from me. I know that its presence is no more necessary to your crowded jewel case than the sender of it is in your life. Nevertheless he asks that you wear it sometimes in memory of all that might have been, of all that never can be. The pearl itself is a tear that has crystallised.”

That was all. She fastened the ring to a long chain that was around her neck and then thrust it back amongst the linen and the lace at her breast.

It should rest there.

Just then the door opened and her maid entered, carrying the bridal bouquet. It was of white roses.

"Is it not lovely, miss!" she remarked laying it gently down, to which her mistress assented indifferently, then she said,

"Frances."

"Yes, miss."

"I have a very bad headache this morning, go and see what you can get me for it."

"Yes, miss, certainly."

Helen Wyverne laid her face down on her arms while a sensation of coming sorrow seemed to sweep over and engulf her. Yet surely she had lived through the worst the other night—endured it—left it behind.

She had made up her mind to think no more of the lover of her girlhood, but to go forward to meet the future with a sincere desire to make it as happy as was humanly possible. If it had cost her many heart pangs to arrive at this conclusion she had given no sign. Her attitude, throughout her engagement had puzzled even Lady Henry, not a sigh, not a whisper, not a suggestion of regret or a desire for things to be other than they were. But she had suffered. Oh! how she had suffered. One must grow young again to know how much.

It was not the every day girlish bride or the shrinking one of romance, but a young woman of imperial looks that went that day down the wide shallow staircase out to the white awning and carpet and the waiting carriage.

The gleam and glint of emeralds at her neck and ears and of violet eyes shining from under a covering of lace, fine as a cobweb, called forth the loud admiration of the stragglers who had already gathered at the entrance.

"You are looking very beautiful, my dear," her mother remarked as the carriage bore them in the direction of Westminster.

"I am glad you think so, mamma," was the quiet reply, and once again a prescience of something dreadful came over Helen Wyverne. Vainly she wondered why.

St. Margaret's was crowded to its utmost capacity. The glow and the flash of the sunlight, the perfume of flowers, the green of towering palms and the subdued murmur of the guests made up a pleasing whole.

The service was very brief, and to Helen it appeared like something in a dream. She uttered the responses mechanically, and in a voice that sounded as if it belonged to some one else.

When they went into the sacristy and the few friends who followed for the signing of the register offered their congratulations, she still carried with her a curious sensation of aloofness from it all, of unreality, while throughout, mingling with the music and above the voices of those around her, stole that sensation of inexplicable sadness.

They passed out through, as it seemed to her, a blurred crowd of forms and faces and were driven rapidly back to Berkeley Square. She was silent and even whiter than her dress on the homegoing, while Glencare in whose veins warm memories danced did not seek to break it.

Once he raised her fingers to his lips.

"I thank you, my dear," he murmured.

When they reached the bottom of St. James Street there was a block in the traffic. The newsboys were calling out the evening papers. "Sensational suicide in Park Lane," shouted one little urchin standing on an island and doing his best to thrust a pink sheet in at the window. The carriage went forward. Helen's heart gave one wild throb of unnameable alarm, then settled down to its normal beating again.

There was a sit down luncheon at small tables in the great gloomy dining-room, brightened however by masses of flowers, gold plate, and servants in powder.

The bride and bridegroom took up their seat under a peal of bells fashioned of lillies. Some of the smartest people in London foregathered there. There were gay voices and laughter and the strains of a string band stationed in the hall without.

Not a shadow seemed to lie anywhere save on Helen's heart, and it seemed to deepen as the minutes raced by. Yet her manner was all that the most captious could have desired.

When at last the moment came for her to go to change

her dress the new Lady Glencare whispered to her own maid,

"Fetch me an evening paper."

Then she closed the door of her room on everyone, even Lady Henry, much to that lady's discomfiture.

"The dear child was always eccentric now that I come to think about it," she reflected, as she retraced her steps downstairs.

Helen threw her wedding finery aside, she felt suffocated. Then she went and sat by the dressing-table to await the coming of the servant.

In a few seconds Frances reappeared. She wore a scared look mingled, however, with that kind of subdued pleasure typical to servants when brought into contact with either tragedy or death.

"If you please, miss—miladi, I mean—I got the paper but I dare not bring it to you."

Helen started to her feet. "Why?" she demanded hoarsely. "Why—what—is it?"

"Because, if you please, your ladyship, Mr. Dunbar shot himself this morning."

Helen stood as one transfixed.

"Mr. Dunbar—shot—himself—this morning." The words came slowly, from between parched lips.

The maid turned away and began to smoothen out the wedding veil.

There was a terrible silence in which the roll of carriage and the echo of various voices sounded.

"Is he dead?" Helen managed to whisper at last.

Frances nodded her head.

Helen drew a long shuddering breath.

"Can I get you anything, miladi?" the maid enquired anxiously after a moment or so.

"No, only keep my mother away and change my things."

A few people more observant than the rest noticed the ghastly pallor of the bride when three-quarters of an hour later she made her reappearance. They noticed also that she studiously avoided Lady Henry's parting embrace.

A special saloon attached to the Scotch Express bore them North to Lady Cumberland's place in Perthshire.

At the station Lady Glencare bought a newspaper and locked it in her bag.

When all good-byes had been said and the train began to move slowly out of the station Helen sank back in her fauteuil with a sigh of relief, Lord Glencare standing at the window till the last moment.

As the train gained speed and left Euston behind, he pulled the blind down over the open window to keep the dust out and turned towards her with a courteous smile. They were alone at last, alone with the present and on the threshold of the future.

"Are you ill?" he enquired with solicitude observing how white she looked.

"No, but Dallas Dunbar, has committed suicide," she answered in a low strangled voice, as if that must convey everything to everyone.

"Suicide—Dunbar—how do you know?" he asked disjointedly.

"You will find the paper in my bag," was the reply. "Read it."

Lord Glencare crossed to where the green crocodile dressing-case reposed in a corner, and took out the *Star* from its resting-place against the gold and tortoise-shell interior. Then he came and sat opposite to his wife, unfolding the paper as he did so. He read the brief account in a horrified silence.

"Good Heavens! it's too awful to think of," he exclaimed.

He looked across at Helen. She was seated slightly forward, her lips tight pressed, staring out at the flying summer's landscape with eyes that did not see it.

"You have read it of course?" he ventured.

"No, I have not." She did not look at him.

"Would you like to hear what they say?"

"No, thank you, the fact is sufficient for me: Dallas is dead."

"Was he very dear to you?" he asked with a vague curiosity.

"He was the man I loved," she answered briefly.

Her brain and body seemed to herself to revolve in a kind of tortured whirl. What her words might mean to the man who heard she did not care.

"The man you loved!" he repeated gazing at her and noting the utter desolation of her expression, of her attitude.

"Yes, I loved Dallas, and in spite of all the morals in England I shall love him in my grave clothes."

The words were coolly, calmly spoken, her voice held no high or excited inflexion.

"Then if that is so why did you marry me?" he asked at last.

Her lovely eyes swept him with a haunting charm.

"I married you only because I had to marry somebody," she answered.

"And I suppose I seemed as good as anyone else," he exclaimed bitterly.

"Mamma thought so."

"I am vastly indebted to Lady Henry."

"I may as well be quite frank with you," Helen began.

"On that score apparently I shall have little to fear."

He did not really care in the least for this beautiful defiant creature—but being a man his vanity suffered.

"Do you object to honesty?"

"On the contrary, I consider half the mistakes of life are caused by want of it."

"For instance?"

"The hideous monotony of the past few hours would never have taken place had you told me what I now know."

"There would have been no necessity for you to have ever known had Dallas lived."

"Then I must indeed be grateful for his death."

Their glances met, crossed, and looked away. Her blood

raced through her veins while the big diamond of his betrothal ring seemed to reflect and flash back at the giver the sullen angry glow of the sinking sun.

"Dallas would never have taken such a step if it had not been for you," she said at last.

"I—what had I to do with his action," he echoed in astonishment.

"He told me himself that you had circulated hideous stories about him that all his friends were cutting him."

"That I did?"

"Yes, you. He said that London was becoming impossible."

"If that was so, I was not responsible for it."

"Of course you were. You must have been. Dallas would not have said so otherwise."

"No, I suppose not."

"He being the soul of honour."

"Quite so."

"Took his own life."

"Yes."

"And you sit quietly there and accept it."

"What else can I do at this stage?"

"Knowing that you drove him to it—" a sob rose and died in her throat.

"No, Helen, that is not true. Dallas was very foolish and I warned him, but I never spoke directly. He was, as a matter of fact, my distant kinsman."

"And a near one of mine," she added bitterly.

"We should both protect him then, now even more than before."

She was silent. He came and sat at her side and took her hand between his.

"Don't let this cruel death come between us on our wedding-day," he entreated softly. "I will do anything in my power to make you happy."

"You can do nothing, thank you," she replied, adding, "Kindly release my hands, your very touch is hateful to me."

To Helen's distorted imagination, following on the mental pains and forebodings of the morning hours, her husband appeared as the destroyer—if not actually, indirectly—of he who lay dead.

Lord Glencare sighed and resumed his seat, his face now almost equalled his wife's for pallor.

"What was the cause of the disagreement between Dallas and you?" she asked at length.

"I cannot say beyond what I have already told you," was the stiff reply.

There was a long silence while the train rushed and oscillated on its way through the green and gracious country.

Glencare looked at his wife.

How beautiful, how cold, how sad, how unattainable she seemed, and how other men would possibly, did envy him.

"You surely never meant what you just said," he exclaimed suddenly. He reached out his hands and took hers,

and felt vaguely pleased as a man always can when touching a young and good-looking woman.

"I meant every word, and until you can prove to me that you had nothing to do with his death I shall believe Dallas."

Nothing could have been colder or more deliberate or trivial than the fashion in which these words were uttered.

Lord Glencare threw himself back in his seat. He suddenly decided, as he had frequently done before, that girls were tiresome.

"I am not likely to prove anything," he said. "I demand, I don't ask, the common respect of belief. What even my servants give to me, is it too much to expect from my wife?" he answered coldly.

"I don't believe you, I cannot believe you."

"Those are bitter words, Helen, for a man to hear. What if some day I said that to you?"

"You are never likely to have occasion to."

"Ah, my dear, life is over full of the occasions that we never expect," he told her.

She was silent. Twilight was gathering fast; the cattle in the fields stood out black and indistinct against the far skyline; a new crescent moon drifted above the tree tops. The train went on with unabated vigour.

"Can you, will you believe in time, and let me teach you to care," he urged with soft insistence, the insistence of a man who had sued often and never sued in vain.

"I don't love you, I doubt that I ever could," she said, "if, of course, you insist, I must give way."

"No, never—never, Helen, I want no such concessions," he cried with vehemence. "They with mock affection can be bought cheap enough, but from you—you, though my heart broke—mind you, I don't think it ever will—I wouldn't even stoop to kiss your hand unless you consented. May I," he asked taking out a cigar.

She bowed permission, after which a long silence not broken till his man came to announce dinner.

* * * * *

It was a week later. Cave-Browne sat amidst a confusion of papers, books and photographs in Dallas Dunbar's rooms. He sat idly smoking and musing, before him lay a large packet heavily sealed and directed to "Lady Glencare, to be delivered into her hands."

Strewn about was a heterogeneous muddle.

The inquest was over, and the verdict, out of deference to his family, had been "death by misadventure" while examining fire-arms.

His will made only the day before had not weighed with an honest English jury one whit. That will, after disposing of merely personal things, left the small income at the testator's disposal to his "friend, Eric Cave-Browne, absolutely."

Cave-Browne thought of him and of it now as he lounged lazily. "Poor boy, how foolish, how unwise," he gazed round the room meditatively, "with all the world

open to him. Nice fellow, too." This reflection came later. "Weak though, very weak. It is criminal for a man to be weak, and immoral for a woman to be so. All the same I'm dammed sorry," and he was too. "I suppose some good people would have the effrontery to say that I was in a measure responsible for it," he reflected in grim amusement as he resumed his task of sorting and destroying documents aided by several brandies and sodas.

"I wonder if she will consent to see me and where," he mused. "I certainly don't desire to run across Glencare. Humph! hope he knows no more than is good for him, the over education of the young is a great mistake, but the enlightenment of the middle aged is a far greater."

Cave-Browne remained until he had made a holocaust of most of the letters and papers, then he locked the room and went out to dinner.

"Poor Dallas," he said once again, "so foolish, so unwise."

CHAPTER XVII

MORRISON and the Baron were back in London, the former at his father's residence, the latter in lodgings in Ebury Street.

Morrison had been spending the few days since his return in the highly respectable society that circulated round his people and was bored unto death.

The Baron had held high festival in the company of the different members of the profession who happened to be in town. They recounted their recent experiences to each other, and Von Kensig enjoyed himself hugely. That he happened to be distractingly short of money mattered not at all.

One night Salutaris, who had been to the play and to supper with his brother and a party, decided to call in on the Baron, whose society he decided would be an invigorating antidote to virtue.

So he went to Ebury Street, ostensibly to discuss immediate plans, ways and means. He found a festive gathering of the boys, amongst whom was a genial old bogus baronet known as Sir George and Mr. Boston Clipper hailing from the States.

The air was thick with cigar smoke and the scent of brandy when Morrison entered. He looked round with a sort of sniff at the company, who however beyond a careless nod or two took no notice of his arrival.

"What was that story about you and Baby Jim down at Atlantic City last year?" one of the men was saying as he addressed himself to Boston Clipper.

That gentleman looked up with a genial laugh. He was very slim and well set up, and flattered himself on being a raconteur of no mean order, and was obviously pleased at being called upon for apparently another anecdote of his adventures.

"It was this way," he replied. "After the Baby's little trouble in Paris (France), which cost me nearly three thousand dollars to pull him through, we went over to the States. We had two valets, about a ton of luggage and a large touring Bubble. At Hot Springs he registered as Lord Arthur James, and we made a fair touch at poker and went by road to Atlantic City. About three combinations were working, so we knew that to do any good we must strike out a new line. Having nothing to do our first evening we went to the Blenheim Hotel and started playing 'cork pool.' I don't believe anyone there had seen the game before, because in about half an hour the room was crowded with people watching us. We are both handy at 'cork' and naturally laid low. Before long Baby came to the end of his cigarettes and sent up word for his man to bring down some. There was a standing order for a big

gold box with a Duke's coronet to be brought on these occasions. When it came Baby helped himself, leaving the box carelessly on a table. In five minutes every sucker in the room had taken a squint at that box and then Baby and I left with the haughty reserve of the British aristocracy. When I came down in the morning—Baby never gets up till twelve—the suckers were about three deep at the bottom of the stairs. I halted and took a look at the sea. My man was waiting behind me.

“‘I'll have a swim,’ I said, ‘take my things to the beach and get me a dressing-place.’

“‘The surf is far too heavy at present, if you will allow me to advise you,’ said a middle aged fellow with money and prosperity just standing out all over him. ‘Won't you come and have a glass of wine with me, sir. I would like you to meet some of my friends.’

“‘With the greatest pleasure,’ I said with my best English accent.

“‘We found a comfortable resting-place. I introduced myself, and the others were presented to me.

“‘That was a curious game you were playing last night,’ began my host. ‘Some of us tried it after you left, but we were not sure of the rules.’

“‘I don't know them all myself, my friend taught ^{it n. f. th} game last winter when I was staying with him at his ^{Castle} in England.’

“‘Castle’ echoed my host, ‘I thought only Dukes and a few Americans had castles in England.’

" 'You are right,' I replied.

" 'But he is registered as Mr. James.'

" 'Well,' said I, 'the Duke wished to travel incognito, so I hope you fellows will help me to humour him. I may just as well tell you now as let you find out for yourselves that he is the Duke of M——. He has only been in America once before when he came here for his marriage, but he now wants to see something of the country and of its people.'

"They all swore to help me keep the Duke's secret, and as their friends helped them, Baby and I had to turn down good mugs instead of looking for them. The weather was very bad after lunch so we played cork pool, being joined by several other men, and we just scooped in a barrel of money. In the evening we had a gala performance. Each shot was worth a small fortune to us, but we left very early in the morning in our car, because it struck me that the Duke of M——'s name was rather heavy metal to monkey with."

"Did you muzzle Baby Jim?" asked Salutaris, "because *when* he speaks even the most hopeless American would know he was a servant."

"I insisted upon his wrapping himself in an air of haughty reserve, and it was markedly successful," Boston Clipper answered.

"All you fellows know Frankie O'Brien, so you must hear a yarn about him," observed Sir George. "Well, the first year during the South African War we went to Burmah to shake the Pagoda tree. We had a bad voyage out, hardly paying

the drink bill, and two days before we arrived Frankie fell down a hatchway wrenching his leg so badly he had to have a crutch. When we got to Rangoon we went ashore and got the Captain to run us out to the Gymkhana. We soon saw what sort of a crowd we were in, a lot of heaven-born, too stuck up to even see one and some policemen without the price of a peg between them. I reckoned that was no use. The Captain told us the only Club in Rangoon where they really played high was the Pegu. To get in there they want to know all about your grandparents, which is rather awkward when hardly one of us can produce a really reliable father."

"I say, Sir George, talk about yourself, Morrison here can trace his descent back to the mummy of a counterfeit coiner, B.C. 11, now in the British Museum. Things were bad in those times and he got caught." It was the Baron who said this.

The protest was overruled.

"Never mind, go on, Sir George," exclaimed several voices.

"Frankie said, 'Leave it to me, Sir George, we will be in the Pegu to-morrow night. I have a grand idea.' Then what do you think Frankie did? He just sat down with apparent difficulty and looked white as a ghost, whereupon a fellow in flannels came up to us saying,

"'Hullo, how did you get your accident? Polo? You are strangers in these parts—eh?'

"Frankie dropped his voice and answered,

"'Spion Kop.'

"Well, boys, you can't stagger me as you know, but the word went round. In ten minutes the men had left the tennis courts, they deserted the bar, and as for the ladies they came in crowds from the lawn to gather round Frankie. To all questions he merely said 'Spion Kop,' looking as faint and ill as a hyena with a liver. There were murmurs of 'I say, what a plucky little chap,' and 'Poor little fellow' on all sides. He was the hero of the hour. We drove back to the hotel in the commissioner's carriage. We were put up at the Pegu the next day. That's how we conquered Burmah, boys, and pulled out in a fortnight with a good many thousand rupees.

"Didn't they find you out?" enquired Morrison with a sneer.

"Yes," answered Sir George slowly, "they did, but happily only when we were speeding across the Bay of Bengal," adding, "I met a man from Rangoon the other day. He told me they are still thirsting for Frankie's blood."

Here Salutaris broke in puffily saying,

"Really I don't like your tales at all. They suggest that you fellows can only break into decent places by telling disgusting lies. Why don't you simply travel on your appearance and personal charm as I do?"

"Ah, Morrison, you see we have not all your fatal gift of beauty," said Boston Clipper. "You are indeed the Adonis of the Profession.

Another man chipped in,

"I say, Morrison, old man, do you remember that night coming up in the Marseilles express when the French woman was pushed into our compartment? She entered, with a bunch of violets in one hand and a pair of corsets in the other. You fellows can imagine how indignant Morrison was. She saw it in the twinkling of an eye so she asked him for some cognac, and then, boys, he covered his virginal head with a blanket, said something uncommonly like 'horrible creature' and shrieked for the conductor."

"Well, what then?" asked everybody.

"Something perfectly awful," said Boston Clipper, dropping his voice to a stage whisper.

Whereupon Salutaris rose to his feet with a dangerously scarlet face and exclaimed,

"That's quite enough. I permit no tales told about myself. Ridicule I like about other people. Now out you all get."

In spite of their being in the Baron's rooms everybody reluctantly and with murmured protests obeyed. They were all afraid of the speaker.

Morrison seized a caraffe of crème de menthe, stood guard over the cigars, tiptoed with much gravity and gave a sigh of relief as the guests left one by one.

"Well, my dear Baron," he began as soon as they were alone, "we have most serious things to discuss. You are looking horribly shaky and cadaverous so you had better

go to bed. I shall not come here in the morning, it is too like a pot-house, we will meet at Rocky's. I want to see the office that you and I have paid for."

He began to put on his coat as he spoke.

"I will telephone Rocky to expect us at twelve."

The Baron stretched sleepily out in an armchair, emitted one or two asinine chuckles, evidently reminiscent, and did not answer. Morrison's nostrils quivered. He opened his opera hat with a bang and was preparing to leave the room when the Baron with difficulty suddenly exclaimed,

"Say, Morrison, you were very short with the boys. What did really happen between you and that Frenchwoman?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Baron," snapped Salutaris, "nothing has ever happened between me and any woman."

He opened the door as he spoke.

"Remember we meet at Rocky's office at twelve. Meanwhile I should recommend your reading that article in the Quarterly, 'Drink as I have seen it.'"

There was no doubting his meaning.

Von Kensig rose unsteadily to his feet and steered straight for the brandy bottle.

"No, old man. Good, kind Morrison always thinking of others. Drink as I am drinking, it is all that I care about."

Salutaris shut the door, leaving the Baron groping blindly for a siphon.

The following morning Rocky in his office was busily

engaged helping himself to diabetic tabloids when Morrison came in, followed soon after by Von Kensig.

There was that almost rural silence which usually prevailed in that particular office at the busiest hours of the day as Rocky enquired with parental solicitude,

"Well, boys, what's the matter now?"

Salutaris drew off his chamois gloves and sat down in the most comfortable chair, while the Baron moved towards the window with a huge cigar.

It was the former who answered,

"We not only have to raise the wind to get away, but owing to your criminal folly, my dear Baron, we must redeem the miniatures you pawned with Madix."

"No need to do that," barked Rocky, "I heard only to-day that your landlord of Hay Hill is in goal. He paid for everything there with forged Ping-Pong Morgan bills."

Von Kensig wheeled round and gave a low whistle of surprised relief saying, "We might as well have put on that bill of sale."

Morrison looked as savagely virtuous as he felt annoyed to realise that Von Kensig had captured one thousand pounds while he had only thought of theft and had lacked the courage to commit it.

To their mutual astonishment after a short silence the Baron asked Rocky to summon Madix immediately to the office by telephone, and would not divulge his plan of action to either of them.

They conversed idly together for about twenty minutes until Madix arrived.

He turned pea green when he saw Von Kensig and tried to shuffle out of the place, saying to Rocky,

"I will not disturb you, Mr. Rawlings. Can I call later?"

"You will come in here immediately," the Baron said sternly, standing very upright.

"Always at your command, Herr Baron. May I be permitted to take a seat?"

Madix bowed his thanks to the others' bows.

Then the Baron drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

"Here is my open cheque value one thousand five hundred pounds, at which price you agreed to re-sell me my miniatures. Kindly cash it and bring the miniatures here within one hour."

Morrison and Rocky stared at each other and then Rocky polished his glasses.

The Baron spoke with princely hauteur, never taking his eyes off those of Madix, who thus had no chance to look to Rocky for inspiration.

"But, Herr Baron, this is so sudden." Madix positively squirmed as he spoke. "Besides I thought you had gone abroad and would not want—"

"You have your money," thundered the Baron quite overlooking that his exact credit balance at the bank was one shilling and threepence, "bring my miniatures. I make no threats, but I repeat bring the miniatures."

"So help me, Moses. Herr Baron, I am a poor man, but honest as the light of day. Mr. Rawlings will tell you that."

The Baron almost smiled at the idea of anyone going to Rocky for a character.

"I ought never to have let you have that one thousand pounds, Herr Baron. I was too proud being able to accommodate you. The money belonged to a friend of mine."

"What has that to do with me?"

"I left them with him as security."

"Very well cash my cheque, pay him, and bring back the miniatures."

"But, Herr Baron, my friend is away."

The Baron strode over to Madix who put up his hands over his face.

"Look here," he said, "I saw some of my miniatures in Bond Street this morning and was offered them for four thousand pounds. I don't want to be hard on you, but what are you going to do?"

"So help my good grashus, Herr Baron, I vill speak the truth if it strangles me. I sold all the miniatures for three thousand pounds yesterday."

"I know you are lying, but I am not a hard man. I want money now. You say you sold for only three thousand pounds. It is ridiculous of course, but I will even allow you the five hundred pounds interest I agreed upon, but you must hand me the other one thousand five hundred pounds now—now do you hear?"

Madix groaned protested—struggled—pleaded—and finally wrote out a cheque for one thousand five hundred pounds, which was cashed very shortly after the ink was dry.

Rocky and Morrison had been amazed spectators. Then when Madix had taken his departure Rocky said with complaint. "You did well, Baron, in an amateur fashion, but you would have been wiser to leave so delicate an operation to me."

"I am satisfied," the Baron laughed as he continued turning towards Salutaris, "but how are you going to find your share for the coming campaign, Morrison? I can't let you have much of this as I have losses to pay on the Stock Exchange."

"Yes, boys, that is important," said Rocky, who was wondering where he was going to get a bit.

Just then the only clerk came in with three or four typewritten letters to be signed—a form never omitted when any of the boys were there. An impressive silence reigned while Rocky scratched his signature at the bottom of each.

"My brother," commenced Morrison when the clerk had left the room, "wants me to marry his sister-in-law. A disgusting idea," he shuddered visibly, "but she has money and we get along fairly well together. He would certainly back my bill for five hundred pounds, if he could not lend me the money, provided I told him I was thinking of proposing but must have a change of air before I finally made up my mind."

"That's good, that's good," barked Rocky as he took another tabloid, "and I can get his paper cashed at fifteen per cent. a year." There was a pause here.

"You don't seem very busy, Rocky," Morrison remarked acidly, as he looked round the room, first at the idle telephone and then listening to the penetrating silence.

"No, boys, we don't seem busy, but I sold four machines yesterday. They won't be paid for for six months, but it will be eighty pounds profit. Not bad between the two of us for one day's work."

"Then let us all go and lunch at the Savoy," exclaimed the Baron.

Shortly afterwards the three sallied forth.

"If we can raise the ready," remarked Morrison, "shall we ask Cave-Browne to join us?"

"No, thank you," the Baron replied, "especially now that that fine spring chicken Dallas is dead."

"Quaint idea to commit suicide," observed Salutaris.

"Very," said Von Kensig, "if I did that I should believe I had really turned into a muck myself."

"It is almost a crime to be crude in one's methods," barked Rocky.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was a month later. Lord and Lady Glencare were back in London. Lady Henry Wyverne had lingered in town so as to be on hand to greet her daughter. But was this peculiarly cold and reserved young woman, who bore her new honours with so strange a reserve, she who so short awhile back had been Helen Wyverne. To break through such frozen calmness as the bride's would have required a stronger nerve than her mother possessed or was ever likely to. They lunched together and talked of everything and nothing. Neither mentioned the name of the dead man, whom Lady Henry with parental prescience felt was like to become more dangerous lying in his grave than he would ever have been in life.

"He was always so horribly selfish," she thought pettishly, "he lived only to annoy me and died in order to continue it." She felt justly aggrieved.

When the luncheon was over Lady Henry made an excuse and left early.

She had scarcely been gone when a letter from Mr. Cave-Browne arrived craving an interview in order to be

allowed to give into her own hands Dallas Dunbar's last commission.

Helen Glencare read the brief note through with a trembling lip.

He had remembered her then, even in that supreme moment of all. She felt glad, thankful to reflect that she too was so rigidly faithful to his dear memory.

She made an appointment to receive Mr. Cave-Browne the following day. Very few words were spoken, when Cave Brown called and gave the packet into her own keeping. He thought he had seldom looked on a handsome immature or a sadder face. He wondered as he went homewards what such a woman could have ever seen in Dallas Dunbar except some fancied picture of her own imagination.

"You were my cousin's great friend," she had said and he had answered "Yes."

That had been almost the extent of what passed between them.

The package contained only her own letters and photos, written during the years of childhood and the entrance to womanhood. There was no line from Dallas to her. Helen locked them away.

The autumn passed, and with it came the rumour that the Glencare marriage was a failure, as everyone had always predicted. How it came, where it emanated from none could tell, but it was started, circulated and generally believed. Then when Glencare himself went on a big

game shooting party to Nairobi, it seemed to give credence and stability to what had been mere gossip.

Lady Henry knew nothing. Her daughter never confided in her. Their intercourse, while always friendly, was confined to the superficial things of life. It was never likely to pass beyond that stage either.

Helen saw her husband leave apparently without any sign of emotion.

Mindful of all observances and ceremonies in his relationship with his wife, Glencare's attitude left nothing to cavil at.

He and she had succeeded in deceiving even their servants, which surely says something for their talent in the doubtful art of social acting.

They had been married for three months and never once had her heart softened or her mind forgiven the injury that she believed had been dealt to the poor weak fellow in his grave.

On Glencare's part was silence. He stooped neither to justification or to seeking that which she denied him—her regard. He had the most marvellous self-control, even Helen had wondered at his coolness, his indifference; had even in a way grown afraid.

Surely there is nothing so disappointing to a woman than a man who—in obedience to her behest—adopts a certain attitude and adheres to it.

They parted those two without explanation or regret.

Lady Glencare was established in the great town house

where, surrounded by lovely things, many acquaintances and plenty of money, the coming winter opened up in auspicious guise.

Yet to Helen the days were a veritable blank. She mourned her cousin unceasingly, and had indeed indulged her sorrow to such an extent that it had in reality ceased to be sorrow and had become a pose, a fetish, an absurd obsession. This, however, she was far from realising.

To her husband she gave little if any thought, least of all any remorse. That she had failed most signally to perform the slightest of the duties she had entered upon, did not cross her mind, or if by any chance such unmannerly reproach obtruded itself on the surface of her splendid egotism, right surely was it promptly banished.

Then one day, without considering the possible consequences, she wrote and asked Cave-Browne to call on her. She knew he was in London, had seen his name as having been present at a dinner given by "The New Vagabond's Club," some few nights before.

When Cave-Browne received the letter written on grey paper with a silver coronet, he hesitated.

He had left women out of his scheme of existence long ago. He could hardly recall when he had last talked to a gentlewoman. His acquaintance for some several years past had been confined to the temporary and spurious spouses of the members of the cardsharpping fraternity, who had alternately amused and bored him; amused him by

their airs of assumption, bored him by their gigantic ignorance.

So with Helen's note in his hand he hesitated, hesitated for many reasons. He guessed pretty accurately that the writer only sought his acquaintance in order to discuss her dead cousin with one who in life had been his almost inseparable companion, and he doubted if such a pastime would be morally healthy for a bride. He also greatly wondered if he would be equal to the strain of inventing stories about Dallas Dunbar sufficiently engrossing to stimulate and hold the attention of one, who—if half the rumours were true—was apt to be somewhat exigent. After all, there had certainly been nothing in any way heroic or out of the common about poor Dallas.

Had he been born with five thousand pounds a year it was possible that he would have developed into a prosy, respectable squire, eager about the crops, the improvement in the breed of pigs, and apprehensive of the future of England. As it was, Dallas had been a mere grossly selfish, weak, young man, with a most pronounced distaste for work and a vague sentimental feeling which in moments of depression he imagined to be love for his very handsome cousin.

All of which Eric Cave-Browne knew and acknowledged, though he had liked the dead passing well.

Under these circumstances the futility of any acquaintance with Lady Glencare was perfectly apparent, besides the possibility of running across people who had dropped

his acquaintance long ago was one that did not appeal to him.

At the same time he disliked Glencare not less completely than Dallas had done, and with a good deal more finish and determination, and he could imagine how furious Glencare would be at any suggestion of a friendly overture from such a quarter. He smiled slightly as that reflection passed through his brain.

Once upon a time he, Cave-Browne, had been able to exercise a good deal of fascination over women, and that without any appreciable effort. It had not made him vain then, and its memory certainly did not make him so now. He only speculated vaguely as to whether that had faded with other attributes. Should he try? It would be a dangerous pleasure and danger must always allure.

So as he hesitated he made up his mind and obeyed the written request.

He found Lady Glencare alone in the smallest of the great suite of reception rooms that overlooked the park.

After discussing the idle nothings of the fleeting hour, Lady Glencare very soon revealed the real reason of her invitation. She wished to consult him about a proposed memorial to her dead cousin and what form it ought to take. She had coloured designs for windows, and fountains with estimates and suggestions which she asked him to examine.

Eric Cave-Browne's manner was perfection, his sympathy

spontaneous, his expression quite admirable, and if the sacred subjects and the red-haired angels with their clouds and harps appeared to him somewhat incongruous and out of keeping, certainly the most astute observer would never have guessed it. It was glaringly obvious that like many another foolish woman Helen had enthroned what was lost on a towering pedestal, the foundation of which was so shaky and unlike the living reality that it could not fail but rouse the listener's latent sense of humour.

Finally, after having assiduously glanced through the coloured plates, Cave-Browne declared himself as divided between a group of latter-day saints and a replica of early Florentine design.

Lady Glencare put them carefully on one side, saying that she would think them well over, and before deciding would submit them to Lady Dallas. Then very shortly after her visitor took his departure.

"What a very nice, sympathetic man," was her reflection, "and how like dear Dallas to have chosen such a friend."

"A sentimental, foolish young woman," was his mental comment as he went down Piccadilly, "sorely in need of a commonsense shower bath, but, by jove, what glorious eyes."

That was the beginning.

A friendship of rapid growth supervened. Mr. Cave-Browne was, when he chose, a more than ordinarily charming companion. He understood the niceness and the subtleties of the feminine character as a violinist his

instrument. He had read, travelled, observed; he was sympathetic, deferential, entertaining, so that perhaps it was not so very surprising that before very long Lady Glencare welcomed his acquaintance for its own sake apart and beyond the memory of the departed. She lingered in town throughout the winter, so did Cave-Browne, he to superintend the furnishing of a tiny house in Curzon Street, the lease of which he had bought. They visited picture galleries and concerts together, and often he joined her in the very early morning when she walked in Kensington Gardens with her dogs.

To him that time was the most innocent he had passed for many a long year. He was peculiarly free, for the crowd of his erstwhile friends, who like other fashionable people, were absent from England, while Lord Glencare was apparently still searching for strange animals in the wilds beyond Nairobi.

Of him his wife never spoke. He wondered at her silence, but admired its reserve. She questioned him closely and often as to what were the causes that had gone to persuade Dallas that people no longer desired to know him, but on that question Eric Browne was as a sealed book. He knew nothing of it. He declared it must have been a hallucination.

In the short, chill January days, Lady Glencare permitted her friend to take her for long motor drives with a complete indifference to any possible comment thereof. Being amazingly self-absorbed and quite innocent, Helen saw

nothing out of the way in accepting the constant attentions of a man who was first of all her cousin's friend, whose manner was ever chivalrous, and whose frank cynicism about life diverted whilst it shocked her. That to him the hours might grow to mean something far different assuredly never dawned upon her imagination, nor was she weatherwise in the barometer of the heart.

Her ideas on such matters were fixed and immutable, single-minded and primitive, particularly so for a young woman who had mixed in the great world and been a spectator of some of its intrigues, its easy relations, its elastic morals and adjustable opinions.

Of her own sin against the dead she thought perpetually, until the one idea fed on indulgence threatened to warp her reason; that she was in any way sinning towards the living she would by no manner of means allow.

Meanwhile the society of this man of the world captivated and stimulated her. She grew to look for his coming and to feel lonely in his absence. Her transparent regard could not fail to be a very insidious flattery to even this war-worn veteran.

At first he had regarded Helen with penetration, amusement, and a little scepticism; now that all changed. He took pains to revive and exercise the magnetic power that once he had possessed over the minds of others. His voice took on a new tenderness when in her presence.

CHAPTER XIX

AT first it had vaguely amused Cave-Browne to indulge her in her morbid self-reproach where Dallas Dunbar was concerned, to encourage her half-expressed fears that had no such unkind rumours been spread by enemies about him that he undoubtedly would have been alive. Naturally Cave-Browne scouted from the very outset the possibility of there having ever been any truth in any of the things that had been mooted abroad.

It suited him to represent the dead in the light of a martyr, and a facile task he found it, easily handled by a man such as the one she had chosen to make a confidant of. That this platonic friendship held any elements of danger, Helen never once thought. Nor indeed did anything in Cave-Browne's manner lead her to suspect that an acquaintance began on his part from sheer idleness intermixed with vague dislike of Glencare himself, and a desire if possible to do that which would prove an intense annoyance—did it ever reach his ear, had now assumed an altogether different complexion.

His influence began to have practical effect in several ways. Unconsciously Helen found herself adopting his

opinions and giving expression to some of the less advanced of his ideas. Gradually his insinuating ways broke down the barrier of her reserve where the relationship between Glencare and herself were concerned, after which it was not a difficult task for Cave-Browne to convince his beautiful friend that her marriage had indeed been a great glittering mistake, of how apparently incapable was her husband of any true appreciation where she was concerned, since he preferred shooting furred and feathered things to remaining in England and trying to win her heart.

At first a feeling of loyalty and of good breeding prompted Helen to defend the absent—whether friend or foe—but after a while that feeling receded and one of over confidence in the present took its place. So things progressed imperceptibly between those two until Cave-Browne awoke suddenly to the extraordinary, the unbelievable fact that he had really fallen in love. He who had never been guilty of such weakness was now the slave of a beautiful, morbid young woman, who dreamt that life was over because one man was dead. The whole affair was absurd, and he blamed himself bitterly for ever having allowed himself to drift into it. He who had vowed never to allow a woman's influence to reign over his life now realised that in spite of the vast, cruel distance that divided them, the world held nothing for him except one pale, passionate, discontented face, realised it with a pain that almost overmastered him, he to whom pain was as strange

a visitant as reproach. Hitherto no hesitation or scruples had ever been allowed to trouble him. Men burdened with such things had appeared to him as so many fevered fools.

He had been a man without morals, without gratitude, without affection. He had regarded men and women—especially men—as so many pawns in his own game. He had used them and passed on, regret had never touched him, conscience had never spoken, and now all suddenly he saw himself as in a mirror and detested what he saw.

Cave-Browne had been playing a game that is very old, very common, very mean. At first it had merely interested him, latterly it had absorbed him. Deceived by her transparent manner, he had dared to dream wild dreams without knowing it that he did so. Possibly there are offerings far less worthy of a woman's acceptance than the first really disinterested affection of a heart that hitherto—if it ever has worshipped at any shrine—it has been that of false gods. Almost a sense of guilt was upon him, the voice of self-accusation actually pursued him. At his own supreme folly he could have laughed, at his own anguish he could have shed tears. It was magical, it was marvellous, but it was also as horrible as it was incredible. As these thoughts passed in swift succession through his mind he was seated in his own sitting-room in the house in Curzon Street.

He thought of Helen as he had seen her only yesterday. Her face floated between him and the atmosphere, and

for her sake it seemed to him that he could bring about miracles more wonderful still it was possible that he might for the first time in a long life efface himself. His first impulse was to leave London, his next was to go and see her.

Self-denial was as yet too novel a sensation—subjecting himself to effort and restraint, though he honestly intended to do it—could be postponed for yet a little while. She represented all that was best in his nature, she roused aught of decency or goodness that was left on the arid surface of his soul.

At the end of January, Lady Henry arrived in town for her Christmas shopping. As has been shown that lady was far from possessing a brilliant brain, nevertheless though Mr. Cave-Browne only made his appearance after five o'clock, quite in the natural manner of an ordinary visitor, Lady Henry's instinct told her that his acquaintance where her child was concerned was best put a stop to and that without any unnecessary delay. This decision she arrived at while exchanging courteous innuendoes over the tea-cups.

That night she wrote to her son-in-law. After lightly touching on the to her unknown cause of his and Helen's apparent disagreement, she urged his return, assigning no particular reason except a mother's love, and under the circumstances natural fears, where a young, handsome and petulant woman was concerned. In a postscript she suggested his returning without any warning,

"pleasant surprises being invariably so charming," as she ingeniously expressed it.

On the one and only occasion that her mother had ventured to question Helen as to the reason for Glencare's prolonged absence which must—if it had not done so already—rouse most unfavourable comment, the reception accorded to her enquiry had been so chilly as to hardly warrant any further remark then or afterwards. Her daughter's answer being very much to the effect that though women might go to the altar to please their parents, that in her opinion the obligation stopped there, and that she considered there was no law, human or divine, that should compel two people to drag a chain of ever growing length and heaviness when the world was so wide.

This letter together with others—one in particular—reached Glencare in camp. He laid his mother-in-law's envelope aside and turned with a faint tremor to the one that was addressed in Madame St. Clair's fine French handwriting. What could she have to say to him? Was it possible that after all—and if it were so what would he do? Ah! He opened it with quick decision in a tumult of a mad, scarcely acknowledged hope. Who could replace the magic of the past as surely as she?

There were but a few words in all. They were dated from Paris and ran as follows :

"I am writing these lines to you because I do not wish that you should hear the news from strangers, or what is even worse a mutual friend. I was married last week very quietly in

London to Gui de Fontenoy, whom you will perhaps remember at Deanville the year before last.

You must not reproach me, my dear friend, either now or when we meet, as we surely must in the future ; nor must you be angry if I dare tell you that rumours have reached me that all is not well with you and the beautiful creature who is your wife. This has distressed me very much. Do not, I pray you, leave her to the possible guidance of others. You sought her and you took her into your life, which leaves your duty very clear before you. Do not think that I wish to preach to you—it would ill become me—but I beg you to read between the lines, and then to look into your own breast which is now as always pure gold. Adieu, adieu."

As he read his face grew very pale under its sunburn. He sat motionless for some long time gazing dreamily out across the landscape through his heavy eyelids, which looked shut, while he followed his own reflections. This was the woman for whom he had been ready at any time to have lost his wisdom and broken his faith. . . . Bah ! the utter futility and hopelessness of such notions.

After quite a long while he mechanically broke the seal and perused Lady Henry's admonition. No doubt, Helen too proud to write herself, had allowed her mother to do so. Perhaps after all he had acted wisely in absenting himself from her side as he had done. At the least it had demonstrated the fact that he was not the slave of his passions or subject to the caprices and hectic imagination of a young and most unreasonable girl.

He had been very unwise to marry, of that there was no doubt. It had been banal—stupid—anyone could have done it, but so far he had preserved his dignity.

He laid Lady Henry's letter on one side, it did not suggest anything to him beyond just the mere words. He only wondered idly if he should act on her advice. His surroundings, his friends, and even the sport were beginning to pall on him.

The flower-like hope that had sprung to life at the unwonted sight of Madame St. Clair's writing had faded not more quickly than it had been borne. The outlook seemed to grow dim and grey to his mental vision. Would it interest or distract him to return and win the heart of the woman of whom he was the nominal, though he had never been the actual possessor.

To him life had always seemed a play to be acted wisely or unwisely according to your own wisdom or talent. Hitherto he had enacted his part at least to his own satisfaction and comfort, now for the first time something seemed to suggest that he had not displayed his accustomed acumen either in his marriage or in the period that had followed, and the thought filled him with a feeling of sharp annoyance. It was such an entirely personal reflection and it offended his pride and lessened his vanity. Some day he would perforce have to return and take up the position and responsibilities which were his, so why not do so now?

Perhaps it was possible, though she had made no sign, that

his wife had relented during these last weary weeks. They must, of course, have proved weary and more than passing lonely to her. Anyway it was impossible that she could persist in the attitude that she had assumed towards him.

The shock of that foolish fellow's death had robbed her for the time of her judgment, even of the excellent good sense that during their short engagement had more than once struck him. No doubt by now she viewed matters more calmly, and knew that he—Glencare—was in no manner responsible for that ugly climax.

Then all at once a kind of horror seized him at the idea of the time that lay ahead, the long conventional years with their round of duties, their interests that to him had never been interesting, the incessant demands on his time and attention.

It was for this future he had resigned his freedom. Surely in so acting he had allowed things to escape his control in a strange and unaccountable fashion, while the one woman whom he would willingly have allowed to become the arbiter of his destiny, the woman on whom he had lavished all the warmth and ardour of a genuine passion, wrote to announce her marriage with another, and with an indescribable lack of feeling seized that opportunity to lecture him on his marital duties. A wave of anger passed over him. He roused himself, indecision still swayed him as to what he would do.

Indecision was a new and far from agreeable acquaintance. However, it was perhaps best to postpone immediate action for a day or so.

CHAPTER XX

It was the night of a fancy dress ball at Covent Garden.

Lady Glencare was present with a large party in a double box—a party who if they had not represented the very last letter of the alphabet in smartness—might possibly have been described as decidedly rowdy: a few captious people might have even thought them not quite sober.

Lady Glencare had latterly been making many new experiments with life. The hour was past two of the clock when a hastily scribbled note reached her. It said:—

“I have met with a slight accident and am a little hurt. My cab collided with an omnibus in Piccadilly. Like a dear, beautiful, and gracious lady call in to see your servant on your way home.

I enclose the door key. I have sent my man away till the morning.

Yours,

E. C. B.

Perhaps amid less exciting surroundings Helen might have hesitated, as it was she only thought of her friend and

his possible pain, and after all what harm could there be in replying to such a request in person?

The clock struck three as Lady Glencare let herself in at the hall door in Curzon Street, having told the cabman to wait a little higher up.

The tiny hall with its green tapestries glowed pleasantly under the rays of the electric light. Cave-Browne was in the sitting-room on the ground floor, lying on a hastily improvised couch made up by the fire. He was deathly pale, and did not make even an attempt to rise as Helen entered, a dazzling apparition in her black domino, powdered with amber coloured bees and purple violets.

"How good of you to come," he murmured gratefully, his gaze sweeping over her brilliant person with a wistful admiration.

"Are you very much hurt?" she asked anxiously as she advanced and put her hand in his.

He shook his head.

"I think I've sprained one of my ribs," he said faintly.

"You see I was thrown right out."

"Haven't you had the doctor?"

"Not yet, you are the only doctor I want. I sent to you immediately," he told her.

"But I can do nothing," she exclaimed anxiously.

"You have already done everything by coming."

"Have you had anything?"

"A little brandy only; I shall be well in the morning," he answered.

Helen stood by the table and regarded him with troubled concern.

"Are you in pain?" she exclaimed, seeing that he made no movement of any kind save with his eyes.

"No, hardly any at all. I've strained my back a little, that is all."

"All! why it is a very great deal. . . . Why did you send your servant away?" she asked.

"Because I wanted to see you, my lovely lady, that is why. Because there is something I must say to you. His gaze sought hers with flamelike swiftness.

"Would it have mattered had he been here?"

"It might have, who knows. I never trust servants. They talk as babies cry, because they cannot help it. Sit down," he entreated her. "Ah! that's better. There is something I have wanted to say for some time past and have lacked the courage," he commenced with an effort, his lips were very pale and set.

"Yes," she murmured

"I've been facing unpoetic facts—one does as one grows old—you know—and I begin to see how utterly impossible it is that the beautiful friendship you have honoured me with can continue."

"Why?" she asked in surprise in a vague embarrassment.

"Because—because I've been mad enough to have been caught on the strong cyclone of a great love," he exclaimed, not looking at her, "in a word, that realising all the dishonour of the past I am determined before it is

too late to grasp some of the virtue of the future." He paused.

Lady Glencare did not realise the meaning of his words, though her heart beat a little apprehensively against the violets at her breast.

"I don't understand exactly," she murmured.

"No, you never would have dreamt that I am mad enough to love you—to adore you." He spoke in a low, hoarse tone, he breathed with difficulty.

A tremor shook her from head to foot, the room and the firelight described giddy gyrations.

"You surely never sent for me—"

He shook his head his face darkened.

"I know what you would say," he answered bitterly, "but there are limits even to my insanity. No, what I have to say concerns you and yours alone. I have accepted your confidence under false pretences, and I must make what reparation I can."

She made a slight gesture of dissent.

"Lady Glencare," he pursued, "after to-night it is not likely that you and I will meet. I want you to lighten my burden by one regret, one great haunting fear. I want you to send for your husband. I want you to fulfil your beautiful destiny."

"My beautiful destiny," she echoed in surprise, "it certainly has never occurred to me to look at it in that light."

"Perhaps not, and that is where I have been to blame,

I who fostered the fantastic folly that has grown up between you and Glencare, I for my own base ends. Perhaps it is possible," he went on hurriedly, while the firelight flickered on his pale features, "that had it not been for this evening I would never have told you this, but now you must hear me to the end. I have been the sinner all through. I set myself to ruin your cousin and I succeeded. I led him into every kind of baseness and brought him down to the level of myself, but your husband—your husband shielded him."

"I can't believe that," she whispered.

"But you must and you shall believe it," he cried, with an effort, "because it is true."

"But you always said——"

"I always told you lies—lies, Heaven forgive me."

"Oh! how can you say such things."

"I say the truth at last, only you must believe and you must forget," he entreated.

She made no reply, and the silence of the room seemed to breathe one long prayer, one long regret.

"I don't know why you tell me this," Helen said at last slowly, painfully. She had risen to her feet, her face was white with emotion, with incredulity.

"I tell you—I tell you these things for the reasons that I have already given," he replied. "Say to me that though you despise me, that you will no longer waste your lovely youth in vain—in false regrets."

"But even if it were, as you say, that he dishonoured

his name, still that does not alter my affection for him, cannot rob me of my dreams, my memories," she told him.

"Mirage, mirage," he murmured and his voice was weak with a sense of his own impotency and the physical pain of his hurts.

Then on a sudden impulse he played his last card, one that hardly ever fails, with any woman.

"Do you realise all the emptiness and loneliness that you are storing up?" he asked her.

"He was the love of my life."

"Nay, my dear, you are wrong, Dallas was the false idol of your girlhood, and he was not even faithful to you."

The words stabbed the listener to the very heart; a sensation of extreme cold and tremor stole over her.

"One does not put out the light of one's soul on a mere word, but if it had been so, if it were so, perhaps—perhaps ——" the speaker faltered.

"You might gather the loose strands of your life together and bind them into a golden chain."

"No—no, I don't think so, but it is possible."

"Lady Glencare, you know all now, you must believe. Surely you don't imagine that ——"

The words died away, Cave-Browne's head fell back, he breathed heavily, some unknown seizure seemed to take him.

"You must go—go," he managed to murmur and his voice was hoarse and unsteady, realising in a numbed, faint

fashion the peril of her position there alone with him at such an hour.

"Not till I bring some one," Helen exclaimed quickly in sudden alarm. She went to the hall door and called the cabman to go for the nearest doctor, returning to the sitting-room she tried to force some brandy down his throat, while listening to the cab bells as they went swiftly down the silent, sleeping street.

For some few minutes he lay still and silent, then the heavy lids lifted slowly and the weary eyes looked up gratefully to hers that were full of fear and regret.

"Thank you," he murmured feebly, a curious dreamy sense of his own helplessness stealing through his senses, "bend a little nearer ; yes. So if anything should happen to me promise that you will remember and believe. Forget my folly and its fruits, it was useless like all the rest, only believe, believe——" a light that was not from the fire came over his face.

When the doctor arrived he bent anxiously over him.

"Heart very irregular," he said when he had made a close examination. "May I ask, are you his wife?" he enquired.

"No," she said, "only a friend."

"Ah ! and how did the accident happen?"

Lady Glencare told him the little that she knew.

"Terrible shock evidently," he commented.

"Is he in any danger?" she enquired fearfully, gazing at his impassive face.

The doctor felt his pulse.

"He is dead," he replied in calm, professional tones.

* * * * *

When Helen Glencare reached home, weary, shaken, unnerved, the sky was growing pink at the breath of dawn, and she was informed that Glencare had returned just after she had gone out the night before.

His wife received the news with a sensation almost akin to fear. What would he say? Would he extend to her the common belief that she had denied to him?

She doubted it.

She shuddered as with cold in the warm fragrance of her rooms. Her maid undressed her and put her to bed, but sleep declined to visit her.

What had brought him back so suddenly without word or warning? How could she explain her presence in Curzon Street? Yet it had to be done and the consequences abided by, too! She tossed restlessly to and fro.

When at last she dozed, her dreams were haunted by the face of one dead man and the possible words of a living one. There would be the inquest and she—she, his last friend, would inevitably be called upon to give evidence.

What would it all mean, what would everybody think?

Then at last she fell sound asleep, just from the sheer fatigue and horrors of remaining awake. Even then the phantoms of the past hours described a hideous circle.

At midday she and Glencare met. Helen was braced for the coming ordeal. He was pale and ill at ease.

"Will you say that you are a little glad to see me?" he said, rising at her entrance and taking her hand in his.

"I suppose I must," she responded.

"Oh, no, never must, that is a hateful word."

"Your return was quite unexpected," she said ignoring his last words.

"Yes, but I hope that did not annoy you."

"Oh no, I was out."

"So they told me. You were at Covent Garden."

She moved restlessly towards the bay-window and sank down on the cushioned seat.

He watched her.

"What is it, Helen, something troubles you?" he asked with a strange new softness in his voice.

His wife looked up. Then her heart went out on a sudden irresistible wave of trust to the tall, stern figure standing there in the dim winter light regarding her with shining, steady, kindly eyes. A strong emotion moved her.

"I think you ought to know," she commenced hurriedly, "in fact, you must know."

It was not without a shuddering reluctance that she could say what she had to say. Nevertheless then and there Helen made full and frank confession, ending only with the vigil of the last few hours. She held nothing back.

Her husband listened in silence, while the winter darkness gathered without and crept inward. How handsome she looked, how frank and innocent as she sat there in the half light and took to herself blame that was not her portion and sued for a pardon that was already hers.

"Can you ever believe that it was all quite innocent?" she asked at last.

"I can," he answered, "and I do, seeing that you tell me so."

"It is more than I deserve," she murmured, and her proud mouth trembled.

For a moment there was silence, then he came and put his arms around her.

"Do you think, my Helen, you could be happy if you consented to forget somethings and find your home here in my heart?"

THE END.

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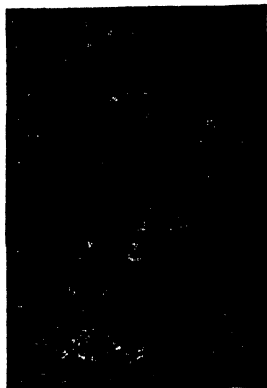
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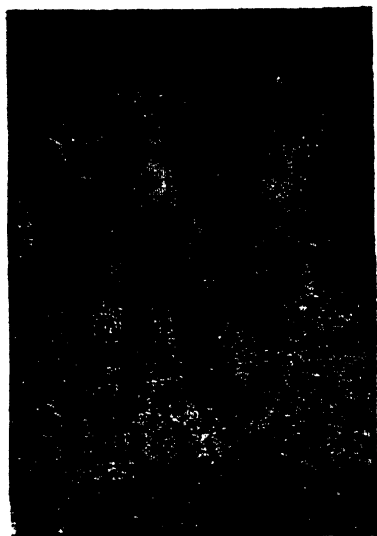
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