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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HIS LORDSHIP'S LEOPARD: A TRUTHFUL
NARRATION OF SOME IMPOSSIBLE FACTS ***

HER LADYSHIP'S ELEPHANT

By DAVID DWIGHT WELLS. With cover by WM. NICHOLSON, 10th Impression. 12mo. \$1.25.

A very humorous story, dealing with English society, growing out of certain experiences of the author while a member of our Embassy in London. The elephant's experiences, also, are based on facts.

The Nation: "He is probably funny because he cannot help it.... Again and again excites spontaneous laughter, is such a boon that its author must consent to be regarded as a benefactor of his kind without responsibility."

New York Tribune: "Mr. Wells allows his sense of humor to play about the personalities of half a dozen men and women whose lives, for a few brief, extraordinary days, are inextricably intertwined with the life of the aforesaid monarch of the jungle.... Smacks of fun which can be created by clever actors placed in excruciatingly droll situations."

Philadelphia Times: "As breezy a bit of fiction as the reading public has lately been offered. Amusing from the first page to the last, unique in conception, and absolutely uproarious in plot."

New York Commercial Advertiser: "A really delicious chain of absurdities which are based upon American independence and impudence; ... exceedingly amusing."

Outlook: "Full of amusing situations."

Buffalo Express: "So amusing is the book that the reader is almost too tired to laugh when the elephant puts in his appearance."

HENRY HOLT & CO.

New York.

HIS LORDSHIP'S LEOPARD

A TRUTHFUL NARRATION OF

SOME IMPOSSIBLE FACTS

BY

DAVID DWIGHT WELLS

Author of "Her Ladyship's Elephant"

NEW YORK

1900

Copyright, 1900,

BY

HENRY HOLT & CO.

WARNING!

The ensuing work is a serious attempt to while away an idle hour. The best criticism that the author received of "Her Ladyship's Elephant" was from an old lady who wrote him that it had made her forget a toothache; the most discouraging, from a critic who approached the book as *serious literature* and treated it according to the standards of *the higher criticism*.

The author takes this occasion to state that he has never been guilty of writing literature, serious or otherwise, and that if any one considers this book a fit subject for the application of the higher criticism, he will treat it as a just ground for an action for libel.

If the *minimum opus* possesses an intrinsic value, it lies in the explanation of the whereabouts of a Spanish gunboat, which, during our late unpleasantness with Spain, the yellow journalists insisted was patrolling the English Channel, in spite of the fact that the U. S. Board of Strategy knew that every available ship belonging to that nation was better employed somewhere else.

Should this *exposé* ruffle another English see, so much the worse for the Bishop.

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PART I.

AMERICA.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH CECIL BANBOROUGH ACHIEVES FAME AND THE "DAILY LEADER" A "SCOOP."

Cecil Banborough stood at one of the front windows of a club which faced on Fifth Avenue, his hands in his pockets, and a cigarette in his mouth, idly watching the varied life of the great thoroughfare. He had returned to the city that morning after a two weeks' absence in the South, and, having finished his lunch, was wondering how he could manage to put in the time till the 4:30 express left for Meadowbrook. 2 P.M., he reflected ruefully, was an hour when New York had no use and no resources for men of leisure like himself.

Yet even for a mere onlooker the panorama of the street was of unusual interest. The avenue was ablaze with hunting, which hurrying thousands pointed out to their companions, while every street-corner had its little group of citizens, discussing with feverish energy and gestures of ill-concealed disquietude the situation of which the gay flags were the outward and visible sign. For in these latter days of April, 1898, a first-class Republic had, from purely philanthropic motives, announced its intention of licking a third-rate Monarchy into the way it should go. Whereat the good citizens had flung broadcast their national emblem to express a patriotic enthusiasm they did not feel, while the wiser heads among them were already whispering that the war was not merely unjustifiable, but might be expensive.

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All these matters, important as they doubtless were, did not interest Cecil Banborough, and indeed were quite dwarfed by the fact that this uncalled-for war had diverted the press from its natural functions, and for the time being had thrown utterly into the shade his new sensational novel, "The Purple Kangaroo." His meditations were, however, interrupted by the sound of voices using perfectly good English, but with an accent which bespoke a European parentage.

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"The Purple Kangaroo," said one. "It is sufficiently striking—*Si, Señor?*"

"It serves the purpose well, *mi amigo*," replied the other. "It is, as you say, striking; indeed nothing better could be devised; while its reputation—" And the voices died away.

Cecil swung rapidly round. Two gentlemen, slight, swarthy, and evidently of a Latin race, were moving slowly down the long drawing-room. They were foreigners certainly, Spaniards possibly, but they had spoken of his book in no modified terms of praise. He drew a little sigh of satisfied contentment and turned again to the street. Ah, if his father, the Bishop of Blanford, could have heard!

The two foreigners had meanwhile continued their conversation, though out of earshot. The elder was speaking.

"As you say, its reputation is so slight," he said, "one of those ephemeral productions that are forgotten in a day, that it will serve our purpose well. We must have a password—the less noticeable the better. When do you return to Washington?"

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"The Legation may be closed at any moment now," replied the younger, seating himself carelessly on the arm of a Morris chair, "and I may be wanted. I go this afternoon, *a dios y a ventura*."

"Softly; not so loud."

"There's no one to hear. Keep us informed, I say. I'll see to the rest. We've our secret lines of communication nearly complete. They may turn us out of their capital, but—we shall know what passes. *Carramba!* What is that?" For, in leaning back, the speaker had come against an unresisting body.

Springing up and turning quickly round, he saw that the chair on the arm of which he had been sitting was already occupied by the slumbering form of a youngish man with clear-cut features and a voluminous golden moustache.

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"*Madre de Dios!* Could he have heard?" exclaimed the younger man, moving away.

"*Malhaya!* No!" replied the other. "These pigs of Americanos who sleep at noonday hear nothing! Come!" And, casting a glance of concentrated contempt at the huddled-up figure, he put his arm through that of his companion, and together they left the room.

A moment later the sleeper sat up, flicked a speck of dust off his coat-sleeve, and, diving into a pocket, produced a note-book and blue pencil and began to write rapidly. Evidently his occupation was a pleasant one, for a broad smile illumined his face.

"Ah, Marchmont," said Banborough, coming towards him, "didn't know you'd waked up."

"Was I asleep?"

"Rather. Don't suppose you saw those Spanish Dons who went out just now?"

"Spaniards?" queried Marchmont, with a preoccupied air. "What about 'em?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, only I supposed that a Spaniard to a yellow journalist was like a red rag to a bull. You should make them into copy—'Conspiracy in a Fifth Avenue Club,' etc."

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"Thanks," said the other, "so I might. Valuable suggestion." And he returned his note-book to his pocket.

"They did me a good turn, anyway," resumed Banborough. "They were talking about my book—thought it would serve its purpose, was very striking, said nothing better could be devised; and they were foreigners, too. I tell you what it is, Marchmont, the public will wake up to the merits

of 'The Purple Kangaroo' some day. Why doesn't the *Daily Leader* notice it?"

"My dear Cecil, give me the space and I'll write a critique the fulsome flattery of which will come up to even your exacting demands. But just at present we're so busy arousing popular enthusiasm that we really haven't time."

"You never do have time," replied Banborough, a trifle petulantly, "except for sleeping after lunch."

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"Ah, that's all in the day's work. But tell me. You're an Englishman; why didn't you publish your book in your own country?"

"I may be green, but I don't impart confidences to an American journalist."

"Nonsense! I never betray my friends' confidences when it's not worth—I should say, out of business hours."

The Englishman laughed.

"Oh, if you don't think it worth while," he said, "I suppose there's no danger, so I'll confess that my literary exile is purely to oblige my father."

"The Bishop of Blanford?"

"The Bishop of Blanford, who has the bad taste to disapprove of 'The Purple Kangaroo.'"

"Has he ever read it?"

"Of course not; the ecclesiastical mind is nothing if not dogmatic."

"My dear fellow, I was only trying to assign a reason."

"Chaff away, but it's principally my Aunt Matilda."

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"The Bishop, I remember, is a widower."

"Rather. My aunt keeps house for him."

"Ah, these aunts!" exclaimed the journalist. "They make no end of trouble—and copy."

"It's not so bad as that," said Cecil; "but she rules the governor with a rod of iron, and she kicked up such a row about my book that I dropped the whole show."

"Don't correspond with 'em?"

"Not on my side. I receive occasional sermons from Blanford."

"Which remain unanswered?"

Cecil nodded, and changed the subject.

"You know my father's cathedral?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. The verger prevented my chipping off a bit of the high altar as a memento the last time I was over. You English are so beastly conservative. Not that the Bishop had anything to do with it."

Banborough laughed, and returned to the charge.

"So I came abroad," he continued, "and approached the most respectable and conservative firm of publishers I could find in New York."

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"Was that out of consideration for the Bishop?"

"I thought it might sweeten the pill. But somehow the book doesn't sell."

"Advertising, my boy—that's the word."

"The traditions of the firm forbid it," objected Banborough.

"Traditions! What's any country less than a thousand years old got to do with traditions?" spluttered Marchmont. "I knew a Chicago author who got a divorce every time he produced a new novel. They sold like hot cakes."

"And the wives?"

"Received ten per cent. of the profits as alimony."

"Talk sense, and say something scandalous about me in the *Leader*. What possessed you, anyway, to join such a disgraceful sheet?"

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"If I'd an entailed estate and an hereditary bishopric, I wouldn't. As it is, it pays."

"The bishopric isn't hereditary," said Cecil. "I wish it were. Then I might have a chance of spending my life in the odour of sanctity and idleness, and the entail is—a dream."

"So you write novels," retorted Marchmont, "that are neither indecent nor political, and expect 'em to succeed. Callow youth! Well, I must be off to the office. I've some copy up my sleeve, and if

it's a go it'll give your book the biggest boom a novel ever had."

"Are you speaking the truth?" said the Englishman. "I beg your pardon. I forgot it was out of professional hours."

"Wait and see," replied the journalist, as he strolled out of the club.

"Hi, Marchmont, I've got a detail for you!" called the editor, making the last correction on a belated form and attempting to revivify a cigar that had long gone out.

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"Yes?" queried Marchmont, slipping off his coat and slipping on a pair of straw cuffs, which was the chief reason why he always sported immaculate linen.

"We're on the track of a big thing. Perhaps you don't know that the President has delivered an ultimatum, and that our Minister at Madrid has received his passports?"

"Saw it on the bulletin-board as I came in," said his subordinate laconically.

"Well, it's a foregone conclusion that the Spanish Legation will establish a secret service in this country, and the paper that shows it up will achieve the biggest scoop on record."

"Naturally. But what then?"

"Why, I give the detail to you. You don't seem to appreciate the situation, man. It's the chance of a lifetime."

"Quite so," replied Marchmont, lighting a cigarette.

"But you can't lose a minute."

"Oh, yes, I can—two or three. Time for a smoke, and then I'll write you a first-column article that'll call for the biggest caps you have in stock."

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"But I— What the— Say, you know something!"

"I know that the secret service has been organised, I know the organisers, and I know the password."

Here Marchmont's chief became unquotable, lapsing into unlimited profanity from sheer joy and exultation.

"I'll give you a rise if you pull this off!" he exclaimed, after hearing the recital of the events at the club. "May I be"—several things—"if I don't! Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Suppose we inform the nearest police station, have the crowd arrested, and take all the glory ourselves."

"Suppose we shut up shop and take a holiday," suggested the chief, with a wealth of scorn.

"Well, what have you to propose?"

"We must work the whole thing through our detective agency."

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"But we haven't a detective agency," objected Marchmont.

"But we will have before sunset," said the chief. "There's O'Brien—"

"Yes. Chucked from Pinkerton's force for habitual drunkenness," interjected his subordinate.

"Just so," said the editor, "and anxious to get a job in consequence. He'll be only too glad to run the whole show for us. The city shall be watched, and the first time 'The Purple Kangaroo' is used in a suspicious sense we'll arrest the offenders, discover the plot, and the *Daily Leader*, as the defender of the nation and the people's bulwark, will increase its circulation a hundred thousand copies! It makes me dizzy to think of it! I tell you what it is, Marchmont, that subeditorship is still vacant, and if you put this through, the place is yours."

The reporter grasped his chief's hand.

"That's white of you, boss," he said, "and I'll do it no matter what it costs or who gets hurt in the process."

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"Right you are!" cried his employer. "The man who edits this paper has got to hustle. Now don't let the grass grow under your feet, and we'll have a drink to celebrate."

When the chief offers to set up a *sub* it means business, and Marchmont was elated accordingly.

At the Club the Bishop's son still contemplated the Avenue from the vantage-point of the most comfortable armchair the room possessed. Praise, he reflected, which was not intended for the author's ear was praise indeed. No man could tell to what it might lead. No one indeed, Cecil Banborough least of all, though he was destined to find out before he was many hours older; for

down in the editorial sanctum of the *Daily Leader* O'Brien was being instructed:

"And if you touch a drop during the next week," reiterated the chief, "I'll put a head on you!"

"But supposin' this dago conspiracy should turn out to be a fake?" objected the Irishman.

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"Then," said the reporter with determination, "you'll have to hatch one yourself, and I'll discover it. But two things are certain. Something's got to be exposed, and I've got to get that editorship."

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CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH CECIL BANBOROUGH ATTEMPTS TO DRIVE PUBLIC OPINION.

It is a trifle chilly in the early morning, even by the first of May, and Cecil shivered slightly as he paced the rustic platform at Meadowbrook with his publisher and host of the night before.

"You see," the great man was saying, "there's an etiquette about all these things. We can't advertise our publications in the elevated trains like tomato catsup or the latest thing in corsets. It's not dignified. The book must succeed, if at all, through the recognised channels of criticism and on its own merits. Of course it's a bad season. But once the war's well under way, people will give up newspapers and return to literature."

"Meantime it wants a boom," contended the young Englishman, with an insistence that apparently jarred on his hearer, who answered shortly:

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"And that, Mr. Banborough, it is not in my power to give your book, or any other man's."

There was an element of finality about this remark which seemed to preclude further conversation, and Cecil took refuge in the morning paper till the train pulled into the Grand Central Station, when the two men shook hands and parted hurriedly, the host on his daily rush to the office, the guest to saunter slowly up the long platform, turning over in his mind the problems suggested by his recent conversation.

The busy life of the great terminus grated upon him, and that is perhaps the reason why his eye rested with a sense of relief on a little group of people who, like himself, seemed to have nothing particular to do. They were six in number, two ladies and four gentlemen, and stood quietly discussing some interesting problem, apparently unconscious of the hurrying crowds which were surging about them.

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Cecil approached them slowly, and was about to pass on when his attention and footsteps were suddenly arrested by hearing the younger of the two ladies remark in a plaintive voice:

"But that doesn't help us to get any breakfast, Alvy."

"No, or dinner either," added the elder lady.

"Well," rejoined the gentleman addressed as "Alvy," who, in contrast to the frock coats and smart tailor-made gowns of his three companions, wore an outing suit, a short overcoat of box-cloth, a light, soft hat, and a rather pronounced four-in-hand tie. "Well, I'm hungry myself, as far as that goes."

Banborough was astonished. These fashionably dressed people in need of a meal? Impossible! And yet—he turned to look at them again. No, they were not quite gentlefolk. There was *something*—He stumbled and nearly fell over a dress-suit case, evidently belonging to one of the party, and marked in large letters, "H. Tybalt Smith. A. B. C. Company."

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Actors, of course. That explained the situation—and the clothes. Another company gone to pieces, and its members landed penniless and in their costumes. It was too bad, and the young woman was so very good-looking. If only he had some legitimate excuse for going to their assistance.

Suddenly he stood motionless, petrified. An idea had occurred to him, the boldness and originality of which fairly took his breath away. "The Purple Kangaroo" wanted advertising, and his publishers refused to help him. Well, why should he not advertise it himself? To think was to act. Already the company were starting in a listless, dispirited way towards the door. The Englishman summoned all his resolution to his aid, and, overcoming his insular reticence, approached the leader of the party, asking if he were Mr. Smith.

"H. Tybalt Smith, at your service, sir," replied that portly and imposing individual.

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Cecil Banborough bowed low.

"I hope you'll not think me intrusive," he said, "but I judge that you're not now engaged, and as I'm at present in want of the services of a first-class theatrical company, I ventured to address you."

"The manager skipped last evening," remarked the man in mufti.

"Alvy," corrected Mr. Smith, "I will conduct these negotiations. As Mr. Spotts says, sir," he continued, indicating the last speaker, "with a colloquialism that is his distinguishing characteristic, our manager is not forthcoming, and—a—er—temporary embarrassment has resulted, so that we should gladly accept the engagement you offer, provided it is not inconsistent with the demands of art."

"Oh, cut it short, Tyb," again interrupted the ingenuous Spotts.

Mr. Smith cast a crushing glance at the youth, and, laying one hand across his ample chest, prepared to launch a withering denunciation at him, when Cecil came to the rescue.

"I was about to suggest," he said, "that if you've not yet breakfasted you would all do so with me, and we can then discuss this matter at length." [Pg 23]

Mr. Smith's denunciation died upon his lips, and a smile of ineffable contentment lighted up his face.

"Sir," he said, "we are obliged—vastly obliged. I speak collectively." And he waved one flabby hand towards his companions. "I have not, however, the honour of knowing your name."

Cecil handed him his card.

"Ah, thanks. Mr. Banborough. Exactly. Permit me to introduce myself: H. Tybalt Smith, Esq., tragedian of the A. B. C. Company. My companions are Mr. Kerrington, the heavy villain; Mr. Mill, the leading serious. Our juvenile, Mr. G. Alvarado Spotts, has already sufficiently introduced himself. The ladies are Mrs. Mackintosh, our senior legitimate," indicating the elder of the two, who smilingly acknowledged the introduction in such a good-natured, hearty manner that for the moment her plain, almost rugged New England countenance was lighted up and she became nearly handsome. "And," continued Mr. Smith, "our leading lady, the Leopard— I mean Miss Violet Arminster," pointing to the bewitching young person in the tailor-made gown. [Pg 24]

Each of the members bowed as his or her name was spoken, and the tragedian continued:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the A. B. C. Company, I have much pleasure in introducing to you—my friend—Mr. Cecil Banborough, who has kindly invited you to breakfast at—the Murray Hill? Shall we say the Murray Hill? Yes."

The ensuing hour having been given up to the serious pursuit of satisfying healthy appetites, the members of the A. B. C. Company heaved sighs of pleasurable repletion, and prepared to listen to their host's proposition in a highly optimistic mood. Banborough, who had already sufficiently breakfasted, employed the interval of the meal in talking to Miss Arminster and in studying his guests. Mrs. Mackintosh, who seemed to take a motherly interest in the charming Violet, and whose honest frankness had appealed to him from the first, appeared to be the good genius of the little company. As he came to know her better during the next few days, under the sharp spur of adversity, he realised more and more how much goodness and strength of character lay hidden under the rough exterior and the sharp tongue, and his liking changed into an honest admiration. Mr. Smith was ponderous and egotistical to the last degree, while Spotts seemed hail-fellow-well-met, the jolliest, brightest, most good-looking and resourceful youth that Cecil had met for many a long day. The other two men were the most reserved of the company, saying little, and devoting themselves to their meal. But it was to Miss Arminster that he found himself especially attracted. From the first moment that he saw her she had exercised a fascination over him, and even his desire for the success of his book gave way to his anxiety for her comfort and happiness. She was by no means difficult to approach; they soon were chatting gaily together, and by the time the repast was finished were quite on the footing of old friends—so much so, indeed, that Cecil ventured to ask her a question which had been uppermost in his mind for some time. [Pg 25]

"Why did Mr. Smith call you the Leopard when he introduced you to me at the station?" he said.

"Oh," she answered, laughing, "that's generally the last bit of information my friends get about me. It has terminated my acquaintance with a lot of gentlemen. Do you think you'd better ask it, just when we are beginning to know one another?"

"Are you another Lohengrin," he said, "and will a white swan come and carry you off as soon as you've told me?"

"More probably a cable-car," she replied, "seeing we're in New York."

"Then I shall defer the evil day as long as possible," he answered.

"You seem to forget," she returned, "that I don't know as yet what our business relations are to be." [Pg 27]

"And you seem to forget," he replied, "that there are still some strawberries left on that dish."

She sighed regretfully, saying:

"I'm afraid they must go till next time—if there's to be a next time."

Banborough vowed to himself that instead of confining the advertisement of his book to the city alone, he would extend it to Harlem and Brooklyn—yes, and to all New York State, if need be, rather than forego the delight of her society.

"Isn't your father an English bishop?" continued Miss Arminster, interrupting his reverie.

"Now how on earth did you know that?" exclaimed Cecil.

The little actress laughed.

"Oh, I know a lot of things," she said. "But I was merely going to suggest that we call you 'Bishop' for short. Banborough's much too long a name for ordinary use. What do you say, boys?" turning to the men of the company.

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A chorus of acclamation greeted this sally, and to the members of the A. B. C. Company Cecil Banborough was 'the Bishop' from that hour.

"And now," said the Englishman, "that you've christened me, suppose we come to the business in hand?"

Every one was at once intently silent.

"I am," he continued, "the author of 'The Purple Kangaroo.'"

The silence became deeper. The audience were politely impressed, and the heavy villain did a bit of dumb show with the leading serious, which only needed to have been a trifle better to have proved convincing.

"Yet," continued the author, "owing to the popular interest in an imminent war and a lack of energy on the part of my publishers, the book doesn't sell."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "Impossible! Why, I was saying only the other day to Henry Irving, 'Hen,' I said—I call him 'Hen' for short,—'that book—'"

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"What you say doesn't cut any ice," broke in Spotts. "What were you saying, sir?"

"I was about to remark," continued Banborough, "that what the novel needs is advertising. For an author to make the round of the shops is so old an artifice that any tradesman would see through it."

"It is," interjected the tragedian. "I have more than once demanded the lower right-hand box when I was playing the leading rôle."

"And always got it," added Spotts. The silence was appalling, and Cecil rushed into the breach, saying:

"It's occurred to me, however, that if a number of people, apparently in different walks of life, were to call at the various bookshops and department stores of the city, demanding copies of 'The Purple Kangaroo,' and refusing to be satisfied with excuses, it might create a market for the book."

"A first-rate idea!" cried Spotts heartily.

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"But supposing it was in stock?" suggested the more cautious duenna.

"I shall of course see you're provided with funds for such an emergency," the author hastened to add; "and if you ladies and gentlemen feel that you could canvass the city thoroughly in my interests at—ten dollars a day and car-fares?" he ventured, fearing he had offered too little.

"I should rather think we do," said Spotts emphatically. "Ten dollars a day and car-fares is downright luxury compared with one-night stands and a salary that doesn't get paid. You're a might good fellow, Mr. Banborough," continued the young actor, "and Violet and I and the rest of the company will do our best to make your book a howling success." And as he spoke he laid his hand familiarly on the little actress's shoulder, an action which did not altogether please Cecil, and made him realise that in the attractive young comedian he had found a strong rival for Miss Arminster's favour.

"Well, then, we'll consider it settled," he said; whereat the company arose and clasped his hands silently. Their satisfaction was too deep for words. Spotts was the first to rouse himself to action.

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"Come," he said, "we mustn't lose any time. Your interests are ours now, Mr. Banborough, and the sooner we get to work the more thoroughly we'll earn our salary," and touching a bell, he said to the answering messenger:

"Bring me a New York directory," thereby showing an honest activity which was much appreciated by his employer.

An hour later, the company, fully primed, departed joyfully on their mission.

Banborough, rich in the comforting sense of a good morning's work well accomplished, retired to his club to dream of the success of his book. In spirit he visited the book-stalls, noting the growing concern of the clerks as they were obliged to turn away customer after customer who clamoured for "The Purple Kangaroo." He saw the hurried consultations with the heads of firms, who at length realised their blind stupidity in neglecting to stock their shelves with the success of the season. He saw the dozens of orders which poured into the publishing house, and heard in fancy that sweetest of all announcements that can fall upon an author's ears: "My dear sir, we have just achieved another edition."

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So dreaming, he was rudely awakened by a slap on the shoulder, and the cheerful voice of Marchmont, saying:

"Who's asleep this time?"

"Not I," replied his friend, "only dreaming."

"Of the success of 'The Purple Kangaroo'?" asked the journalist. "Well, you'll have it, old man—see if you don't—and live to bless the name of Marchmont and the *Daily Leader*. Why, thousands will be reading your book before the week's out."

"What do you mean?" gasped the Englishman. "Surely you don't know—?" For he feared the discovery of his little plot.

"Know!" replied the journalist. "I know that your book has leaped at one bound from fiction to the exalted sphere of politics. Now don't you breathe a word of this, for it's professional, but the Spanish secret-service agents have taken the title of your novel as their password. The city is watched by our own special corps of detectives, and the instant 'The Purple Kangaroo' is used in a suspicious sense we arrest the spies and unravel the plot." [Pg 33]

"But, good heavens, man! You don't understand—" began Banborough.

"I understand it all. I tell you the *Daily Leader* will not shrink from its duty. It'll leave no stone unturned to hound the offenders down. I dare say they may be making arrests even now, and once started, we'll never pause till every Spanish sympathiser who has knowledge of the plot is under lock and key."

"Stop! Stop!" cried Cecil. "You don't know what you're doing!"

"Oh, trust me for that, and think of the boom your book'll get. I'll make it my special care. I tell you 'The Purple Kangaroo' will be all the rage." [Pg 34]

"But you're making a ghastly mistake," insisted the author. "You must listen to me—"

"Can't!" cried Marchmont, springing up as the sound of shouts and clanging bells fell upon his ear. "There's a fire! See you later!" and he dashed out of the club and was gone.

Cecil sank back in his chair fairly paralysed.

"Good heavens! Suppose any of the company should be suspected or arrested! Supposing—"

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said a page at his elbow.

"Show him in!" cried Banborough, fearing the worst, as he read Tybalt Smith's name on the card.

There was no need to have given the message. The actor was at the page's heels, dishevelled, distraught.

"Do you know we're taken for Spanish spies?" he gasped.

"Yes, yes; I've just heard—"

"But they've arrested—"

"Not one of your companions—Spotts, Kerrington, or Mill?" [Pg 35]

"No," said the tragedian, shaking his head, "they've arrested Miss Arminster." [Pg 36]

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH CECIL BANBOROUGH DRIVES A BLACK MARIA.

Cecil Banborough's feelings can be better imagined than described at the announcement of the calamity which had befallen Miss Arminster. The winsome ways of the charming Violet had impressed the young man more deeply than he knew until he was brought face to face with a realisation of the miseries to which his own folly had exposed her.

"Where have they taken her?" he demanded of Smith as soon as his consternation could find expression.

"She's at the police station round the corner from here."

"Where did this occur?" asked Banborough.

"On Fourteenth Street," replied Smith, "Spotts and I met Miss Arminster, and she called out as she passed me, 'Don't forget "The Purple Kangaroo!"' A minute later the police arrested her, and when the crowd heard that she was a Spanish spy, I swear I think they'd have torn her in pieces if the officers hadn't put her in a prison van and got her away." [Pg 37]

The tragedian paused, shivering from his recent agitation, and Cecil, seeing his condition, rang for some brandy.

"But what does it all mean?" asked the actor, tossing off his drink.

"I know what it means," cried Banborough, "but there's no time to talk now. We've not a moment to lose!" and he rushed downstairs.

Spotts met them at the doorway, and, as they walked rapidly along, the young Englishman poured into his companions' ears an account of what he had learned from Marchmont of the Spanish plot and the unforeseen use which had been made of the title of his book, while the tragedian rehearsed again the story of Miss Arminster's arrest, of his own hair-breadth escape from the clutches of the law, of his prodigies of valour in connection with Spotts, whom he had met in his headlong flight, and who, it seemed, had prevailed on his more timid companion to follow the prisoner in a hansom.

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"It's a bad business," admitted Cecil; "but what's to be done?"

"Done!" exclaimed Smith in tragic tones. "Why, rescue the lady instantly and leave the city without delay. In the present excited state of the public no amount of explanation will avail. We may all be arrested as confederates. We must act!"

"You're talking sense for once," said Spotts. "Heroic measures are the only ones worth considering, and if you"—turning to Banborough—"will stand by us, we may come out on top after all."

"You can depend on me to any extent," declared the young author. "I've got you into this scrape, and I'll do my best to get you out of it."

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"That's just what I expected of you, Bishop!" exclaimed Spotts, grasping his hand. "We can't waste time in talking. You must go and find the other members of the company, Tyb, and warn them of their danger. Now where can we rendezvous outside the city? Speak quickly, some one!"

"The leading hotel in Yonkers," said Smith.

"Right you are," replied Spotts. "Get there as soon as possible and wait for us to turn up. How about funds?"

"I've plenty of ready money with me," volunteered Cecil, "and very fortunately a draft to my credit arrived to-day, which I've not yet cashed."

"Good!" said Spotts. "We're in luck. Give Tyb fifty."

Banborough whipped out a roll of bills and handed the desired amount to the tragedian without demur.

"Now, off you go," cried his brother actor, "and keep your wits about you."

Smith nodded and hailed a passing cab.

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"Come," said Spotts to the author, "we've no time to lose."

"What's your plan?" asked Cecil as they swung round the corner and sighted the police station.

"Haven't got any as yet. We'll see how the land lies first. The Black Maria's still before the door. That's lucky!"

Sure enough, there it was, looking gloomily like an undertaker's wagon, minus the plate glass.

"Must be hot inside," commented the actor, directing a glance at the two little grated slits high up in the folding doors at the back, which apparently formed the only means of ventilation.

Cecil shuddered as he thought of the discomforts which the girl must be enduring, and longed to throw himself upon the vehicle and batter it to pieces. But calmer judgment prevailed, and controlling himself he approached the police station, saying:

"Let me go first. You might be recognised. I'll try and find out where she's to be taken."

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He accordingly went up to the driver of the Black Maria, who, cap in hand, was wiping his perspiring forehead.

"A fine pair of horses that," he said, indicating the mettlesome bays attached to the vehicle, which, in spite of their brisk run, were tossing their heads and fretting to be off.

"Oh, they're good enough," was the curt reply. "A trifle fresh, but we need that in our business."

"Something interesting on to-day?" queried Cecil.

"Who the devil are you, anyway?" asked the driver abruptly. And the Englishman, lying boldly, replied:

"I'm the new reporter on the *Daily Leader*. I was here last week with Mr. Marchmont on a burglary case."

"Oh, the New Rochelle robbery," suggested the driver.

Cecil acquiesced, drawing a quiet sigh of relief that his random shot had hit the mark.

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"Yes," he said, "that's it. I was introduced round, but I don't remember meeting you."

"Might have been the other driver, Jim?"

"Now I come to think of it, it was Jim."

"Jus' so. Well, there's copy for you in this case."

"So I imagined. It's your first political arrest, isn't it?"

"That's where the hitch comes in," said the man. "I don't know where to deliver the prisoner. When the court's made up its mind they'll let me know, and I'll drive on. Now in the Civil War we sent them politicals to Fort Wadsworth."

"So you have to wait till they decide?"

"You bet I have. And there ain't no superfluity of shade on the sunny side of this street neither," replied the driver, as he slipped off his coat and hung it with his cap on a peg beside the box seat of the Black Maria.

"Suppose you were to run into the court and see how they're getting on," suggested Banborough, slipping a coin into his hand. "I want a word with the police when they've finished. Mention the *Daily Leader*. I'll watch your horses."

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"Oh, they'll stand quiet enough," said the man. Then, suspiciously, jerking his thumb over his shoulder towards Spotts, he asked: "Who's yer pal?"

"Just a green hand whom I'm initiating into the business."

"You're pretty green yourself or you wouldn't have set me up," said the driver. "But if you'll mind them horses I'll just run across to McCafferty's saloon and have a schooner of beer, and then drop into court for you."

"All right," responded Cecil. "Only don't be all day; I've got another detail."

"Say," rejoined the man, "I can put beer down quicker than you can wink." And he ran across the street.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Banborough, as the man left them.

"That's easily answered," replied Spotts. "When he's in court we'll jump on the box, drive for all we're worth till we've eluded pursuit, then rescue Miss Arminster and be off to Yonkers."

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"But that's laying ourselves open to arrest," expostulated the Englishman.

"We've done that already," said his friend.

"But they'll know we're not officials: we've no uniform."

"What, not when the driver has obligingly left his hat and coat?" said Spotts. "Slip them on. You've dark trousers, and no one will suspect."

"But driving fast—?" protested the author.

"Well, we're going to a 'hurry call,' of course. You've no invention, man! And besides, I can't drive."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," said Banborough. "I understand all about horses."

"So I supposed, as you're an Englishman."

"I don't care much for this business, you know," remonstrated the unfortunate author.

"Neither do I," replied the actor. "But we might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, and we've a good chance of winning. Here comes the driver; give him a bluff."

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"I ain't lost much time," panted that individual as he passed them, wiping the foam from his moustache with the back of his hand, and adding: "I'll run right into court and be out again in a jiffy!"

"Stay long enough to see how things are going," called Cecil.

"All right! Guess the horses'll stand," he replied, and disappeared within the building.

"Now, Bishop!" cried Spotts. And before the Englishman could think, his coat and hat had been whipped off and thrown on the box seat along with a small handbag which the actor carried, and he was being helped into the very hot and unsavoury clothes of the driver.

"Lucky they fit you," said his friend. "Lead the horses carefully to the corner, and see they don't make more noise than necessary. If the driver should come out, you let 'em go; otherwise wait for me. Know where to drive?"

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"Along the park?"

"No," said Spotts. "Double several times, then try one of the avenues to the Harlem River. There are plenty of bridges. Now, careful!" And as Cecil moved slowly off, leading the horses towards the upper corner, the actor lounged up to the entrance of the court, blocking the doorway with his athletic figure.

After what seemed an eternity, Banborough achieved the corner of the block, and, mounting the box, turned the horses' heads down the side street, keeping an eagle eye upon the entrance of the court-room, within which his companion had now disappeared. Perhaps three minutes had elapsed when the actor came out, running quietly towards him so as not to attract attention. The street was well-nigh deserted, and no one seemed to have noticed the movements of the Black Maria.

"Walk slowly till we're round the corner, and then drive for all you're worth!" gasped Spotts, springing on to the seat beside him.

Cecil followed his directions implicitly, and a moment later they went tearing down the side street, and swung round the corner into an avenue, nearly colliding with a cable-car in the process, and causing a wild scatteration of passengers and pedestrians. [Pg 47]

"Here, that won't do!" cried the actor above the rattle occasioned by their rapid progress over the cobblestones. "Ring the bell, or we'll be arrested!"

"Where?" called Banborough.

"That knob under your feet. Press it!"

The Englishman did as directed, and instantly the most hideous clamour arose beneath the carriage. The horses, which had been flying before, excited by the noise, put down their heads and tore blindly forward. The vehicle rocked and swayed, and the avenue and its occupants swept by in an indistinguishable blur.

"They'll surely track us by the noise!" screamed Cecil, trying to make himself heard above the horrible din.

"We're too far off by this time," returned Spotts. "Can you manage the horses?" [Pg 48]

"Oh, they're all right so long as we've a clear road!" yelled Banborough in reply.

They were now well under way, the traffic ahead of them swerving wildly to right and left at the insistent clamour of the bell. They rushed forward by leaps and bounds, an occasional stretch of asphalt giving them an instant's respite from the dreadful shaking of the cobblestones. They spoke but little, excitement keeping them quiet, but the Englishman suffered keenly in spirit at the thought of what the delicate girl, shut up in that dark stifling prison behind them, must be undergoing.

Suddenly in front of them loomed up the helmeted figure of a policeman, swinging his club and gesticulating wildly.

"Run him down!" howled Spotts; and Cecil, who had caught some of the madness of their wild flight, lashed the horses afresh and hurled the Black Maria straight at the officer of the law.

The constable, still gesticulating, made a hasty leap to one side, and they swept by a huge express-wagon which was coming up the cross-street, nearly grazing the noses of the rearing horses, and catching a glimpse of the driver's startled face. [Pg 49]

So they ran on and on, faster and faster as the traffic became less, and the pair of bays settled down in earnest to the race. Suddenly the street narrowed, and a confused mass of carts and horses seemed to block up the farther end. Banborough put on the brake, and with considerable difficulty succeeded in bringing his team to a standstill on the outer edge of the throng.

"It's the Harlem River," cried Spotts, "and the drawbridge is up, curse the luck!"

There was nothing for it but wait, and Cecil, jumping down, patted the horses and examined the harness to make sure that everything was all right.

"You seem in a rush," said a neighbouring driver.

"Hurry call to Harlem," replied Banborough brusquely.

"Whereabouts?" [Pg 50]

"Oh, police station."

"What station?"

The Englishman grunted an inaudible reply as a forward movement of the crowd betokened that the bridge was again in position. A moment later they were trotting towards freedom and the open country, Cecil making the horses go slower now, wishing to reserve their strength for any unforeseen emergency.

As the buildings grew more scattered, and patches of woodland appeared here and there, the actor began to discuss with his companion their plan of campaign.

"The sooner we get Violet out of her prison," he said, "and leave this confounded vehicle behind, the better."

"It's rather too well populated about here to suit me," replied Banborough. "But the police haven't been idle since we started, and our flight has probably been telegraphed all over the countryside. Perhaps we'd better run the risk, for if we're caught red-handed with the Black [Pg 51]

Maria we'll find some difficulty in proving our innocence."

"Besides which, I'm anxious to get Miss Arminster out of durance vile as soon as possible, for I think the Leopard's been caged long enough," said Spotts, laughing.

"Why do you people insist on calling Miss Arminster the Leopard?" asked Banborough.

"Oh," said his companion, "I think I'd better let you find that out for yourself. It would hardly be fair to Violet, and besides—" Then, breaking off suddenly as they entered a strip of woodland, he changed the conversation abruptly, saying: "Here's as good a place as we're likely to find—no houses in sight, and a clear view of the road in either direction." And as Cecil drew up the horses he jumped off the box.

"How are you going to open the confounded thing?" asked the author.

"Well," replied his companion, "I should think a key would be as good a method as any other."

"The best, provided you've got the key."

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"I imagine you'll find it in the right-hand outside pocket of the driver's coat," said Spotts. "I thought I heard something jingle as I was helping you on with it."

"Right you are," said the Englishman. "Here it is!" producing two nickel-plated keys on a ring. "Now we'll have her out in no time." And running round to the back of the vehicle, he unlocked the folding doors and threw them wide open, crying:

"My dear Miss Arminster, accept your freedom and a thousand pardons for such rough treatment. What the—!" And he stopped short, too surprised to finish; for, instead of the petite form of the fascinating Violet, there shambled out on to the road the slouching figure of a disreputable tramp, clothed in nondescript garments of uncertain age and colour, terminating in a pair of broken boots, out of which protruded sockless feet. He had a rough shock of hair, surmounted by a soft hat full of holes, and a fat German face, whose ugliness was further enhanced by the red stubbly growth of a week's beard.

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"I guess youse gents has rescued me unbeknownst, and I'm much obleeged, though I don't know but what I'd rather break stones up to Sing Sing than be chucked round the way I has been for the last hour."

"Who are you?" demanded Banborough.

"Me?" said the figure. "Oh, I'm an anarchist."

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CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE BLACK MARIA RECEIVES A NEW INMATE.

At the sight of this astonishing and utterly unlooked-for personage, the actor and the Englishman stood for a moment gaping at each other in surprised silence. Then, as the full force of what they had done occurred to them, and they realised that, at great risk of life, limb, and freedom, they had rescued from the clutches of the law an utterly worthless tramp, they burst into peals of uncontrollable laughter.

"But where's Violet?" gasped Spotts, who was the first to recover himself.

"Oh, there's a lady in there, if you mean *her*," said the tramp, indicating the cavernous depths of the Black Maria.

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"Yes, I'm here all right," came the welcome tones of the little actress's voice. "I'll be out in just a moment, as soon as I've put myself straight. You're the most reckless drivers I ever saw."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Banborough, approaching the door to help her out. "But circumstances didn't leave us much choice."

"Apparently not," she replied, and a moment later stood in their midst, looking even more bewitching than usual in her dishevelled condition. Then as she drew a long breath, inhaling the fresh woodland air, and realising all the joy of her restored freedom, the eternal feminine reasserted itself, and, seizing both of Spotts's hands, she cried impetuously: "Look at me, Alvy, and tell me if my hat is straight."

They all laughed, which broke the tension of the situation.

"I don't know what you must think of us," said Banborough.

"I thought I was being run away with at first," she said; "but when I heard Alvy's voice on the box I knew it must be all right."

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"Of course," continued Cecil, "we hadn't the least idea there was anybody else in the van."

"Oh, I didn't mind so much," she said. "He was quite nice and respectful, and very soft to fall on. I

guess he must be all black and blue from the number of times I hit him."

"Well, you're safe, and that's the main thing," said Spotts.

"But what does it all mean?" she demanded.

"Oh, there's time enough for explanations later on," returned the actor. "We're not out of the woods yet."

"Of course we aren't, stupid! Any one can see that."

"Metaphorically, he means," said Cecil. "But, joking apart, this Black Maria is, so to speak *particeps criminis*, and the sooner we lose it the better."

"Which way shall we go?" she asked.

"Oh, that's been all arranged beforehand with the other members of the party," said Spotts, purposely omitting to mention their destination in the presence of their undesirable companion. "It can't be more than a mile or two across country to the Hudson River Railroad, and we'd better make for the nearest station. Do you feel up to walking?"

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"Do I feel up to walking!" she exclaimed. "Well, if you'd been chucked round for an hour without being consulted, I guess you'd feel like doing a little locomotion on your own account." And without another word the three turned to get their belongings.

"Say," interjected the tramp, "where do I come in?"

"Oh, but you don't," said Spotts. "We're going to leave you this beautiful carriage and pair with our blessing. Better take a drive in the country and enjoy the fresh air."

"Yah!" snarled the disreputable one in reply. "That don't go! It's too thin! Why, look here, boss," he continued, addressing Banborough, "you went and 'scaped with me without so much as sayin' by your leave, and now, when you've gone and laid me open to extra time for evadin' of my penalty, you've got the cheek to propose to leave me alone in a cold world with *that!*" And he pointed expressively at the Black Maria.

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"It is rather hard lines," admitted Cecil. "But, you see, it would never do to have you with us, my man. Why, your clothes would give us away directly."

"And I'll give yer away directly to the cops if you don't take me along."

Banborough and Spotts looked at each other in redoubled perplexity.

"You see," continued the anarchist, "I don't go for to blow on no blokes as has stood by me as youse has, but it's sink or swim together. Besides, you'd get lost in this country in no time, while I knows it well. Why, I burgled here as a boy."

"What's to be done?" asked Cecil.

"Oh, I suppose we've got to take him along," replied the actor. "We're all in the same boat, if it comes to that."

"Now if youse gents," suggested the tramp, "could find an extra pair of pants between you, this coat and hat would suit me down to the ground." And he laid a dirty paw on Banborough's discarded garments.

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"No you don't!" cried that gentleman, hastily recovering his possessions. "Haven't you got any clothes in that bag of yours, Spotts?"

"Well, I *have* got a costume, Bishop, and that's a fact," replied the actor; "but it's hardly in his line, I should think."

"What is it?" asked the Englishman. "You seem about of a size."

"It's a Quaker outfit. I used it in a curtain-raiser we were playing."

"That would do very well," said Cecil, "if it isn't too pronounced."

"Oh, it's tame enough," replied the actor, who exercised a restraint in his art for which those who met him casually did not give him credit. Indeed, among the many admirable qualities which led people to predict a brilliant future for Spotts was the fact that he never overdid anything.

"Huh!" grunted the tramp, "I dunno but what I'd as lieve sport a shovel hat as the suit of bedticking they give yer up the river. I used to work round Philidelphy some, and I guess I could do the lingo."

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"Give them to him," said Banborough. "I'll make it good to you."

"Well, take them, then," replied Spotts regretfully, handing their unwelcome companion the outfit which he produced from his bag, adding as he pointed to the woods: "Get in there and change quickly. We ought to be moving."

The tramp made one step towards the underbrush, and then, pausing doubtfully, said:

"You don't happen to have a razor and a bit of looking-glass about yer, do yer? I see there's a

brook here, and there ain't nothin' Quakery about my beard."

The actor's face was a study.

"I'm afraid there's no escape from it, old man," remarked Cecil. "If you've your shaving materials with you, let him have them."

"There they are. You needn't trouble to return them."

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Their recipient grinned appreciatively, and as the last rustle of his retirement into privacy died away, Miss Arminster turned to Banborough and demanded:

"Now tell me what I was arrested for, why you two ran away with me, and where I'm being taken."

"I can answer the first of those questions," broke in Spotts. "You're a Spanish sympathiser and a political spy."

"I'm nothing of the sort, as you know very well!" she replied, colouring violently. "I'm the leading lady of the A. B. C. Company."

"Of course *we* know it," returned the actor; "but the police have chosen to take a different view of the matter."

"Why is he chaffing me like this?" she said, appealing to Cecil.

"I'm afraid it's a grim reality," he replied. "You see, when the Spanish officials were turned out of Washington, they'd the impertinence to take the title of my book as their password."

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"Well, then," she said, "they did what they'd no right to do."

"I suppose that would be a question of international copyright," he replied. "But 'The Purple Kangaroo' has proved itself a most troublesome animal, and as I thought you wouldn't care for quarters down the bay till the war was over, I took the liberty of running off with you."

"I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure; but what next?"

"We're all to rendezvous at Yonkers."

"And then?"

"Well, unless the situation improves, I'm afraid it'll become a question of seeking a refuge in another country."

"If you think," she cried, "that I'm going to spend the rest of my existence in the forests of Yucatan or on the plains of Patagonia, you're mightily mistaken!"

"Oh," he said, laughing, "it isn't as bad as all that. Ours is only a political crime, and Canada will afford a safe harbour from the extradition laws."

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"But the war won't be finished in a day," she contended, her eyes beginning to fill with tears.

"Won't you trust me?" asked Cecil, taking both her hands. "Won't you let me prove my repentance by guarding your welfare? Won't you—"

Indeed there is no knowing to what he might have committed himself in the face of such beauty and sorrow had not Spotts broken in with a cry of:

"It's all up now! We're done for, and no mistake!" And he pointed to the figure of a short, fat, red-faced man, very much out of breath, who was bustling down the road, waving his hands at them and shouting "Hi!"

"You'd better go and warn the tramp," said Banborough; and the actor plunged into the woods.

A moment later the stranger came up to them, and panted out:

"I arrest you both, in the name of the law!"

Neither said anything, but Banborough took one of Miss Arminster's tiny gloved hands in his own and gave it a little squeeze just by way of reassuring her.

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"Well," said the new arrival, as soon as he had recovered his breath, "what have you got to say for yourselves?"

"I don't know that we've anything to say," replied Cecil sheepishly.

"I should think not!" said the other. "Here, take off that coat!" And he stripped the official garment from the Englishman's shoulders. "The cap, too!"

Banborough handed it to him, saying as he did so:

"You're a police official, I suppose?"

"I'm the Justice of the Peace from the next town. They just missed catching you at the last place you drove through, and telegraphed on to me. Knowing there was a cross-road here, I wasn't going to take any chance of losing you. I left the police to follow. They'll be along in a minute."

Now what do you mean by it?"

"I don't suppose any explanations of mine would persuade you that you're making a mistake," said Banborough. [Pg 65]

"No, I don't suppose they would. Now you put on that coat accidentally, didn't you? Just absent-mindedly—"

"I don't know you," broke in the Englishman, "and I don't—"

"That'll do," said the Justice of the Peace. "I don't know you either, and—yes, I do know the woman." Then turning to Miss Arminster, he continued: "Didn't I perform the marriage ceremony over you the year before last?"

"Yes," she said softly. And Cecil relinquished her hand. This, he considered, was worse than being arrested.

"I thought I did," went on the magistrate. "I don't often forget a face, and I'm sorry to see you in such bad company."

The young girl began to show signs of breaking down, and the situation was fast becoming acute, when the unexpected tones of an unctuous voice suddenly diverted everybody's attention. [Pg 66]

"Why is thee so violent, friend?" said some one behind them. And turning quickly, they perceived the sleek, clean-shaven, well-groomed figure of a Quaker, dressed in a shad-bellied brown coat, a low black silk hat with a curved brim, and square shoes.

"Who the devil—!" began the officer.

"Fie! fie!" said the stranger. "Abstain from cursings and revilings in thy speech. But I am glad thee hast come, for verily I feared the workers of iniquity were abroad."

"Oh, you know something about it, do you?" asked the Justice of the Peace.

"I was returning from a meeting of the Friends," continued the Quaker blandly, "when I came upon these two misguided souls. As my counsellings were not heeded, and I am a man of peace, I had retired into the woods to pursue my way uninterrupted, when I heard thee approach."

"Well, I'll be glad of your assistance, though I daresay I could have managed them until the police came. They're a dangerous pair. [Pg 67]

"And what will thee do with the other prisoner, friend?"

"Eh? What other prisoner?"

"The one that lies in a debauched sleep at the farther end of the van. I have striven to arouse him, but in vain."

"Where is he?" said the magistrate, peering into the black depths of the waggon.

"In the far corner. Thee canst not see him from here."

"I'll have him out in no time!" exclaimed the officer, springing into the van, with the driver's hat and coat still in his hand.

"Not if I knows it, you old bloke!" cried the sometime Quaker, slamming the door and turning the key with vicious enjoyment, while his three companions, for Spotts had emerged from the wood, executed a war-dance round the vehicle out of sheer joy and exultation. From within proceeded a variety of curses and imprecations, while the Black Maria bounced upon its springs as if a young elephant had gone mad inside. [Pg 68]

Suddenly the Quaker laid a detaining hand upon Banborough's shoulder, saying:

"Take care, boss; here come the cops! I'll play the leading rôle, and you follow the cues."

They all paused and stood listening, while the rapid beat of a horse's hoofs came to their ears, and a second later a Concord waggon, loaded down with policemen, swung into view round the corner of the road, and presently drew up beside them.

"Thee hast come in good time, friend," said the Quaker to the chief officer. "We have watched thy prisoners overlong already."

"Where's the boss?" demanded the official.

"Dost thee mean the worldly man with the red face, much given to profane speaking?"

"I guess that's him," laughed one of the subordinates.

"As I was returning from a meeting of the Friends with these good people," pursued the Quaker, indicating his companions, "we came upon this vehicle standing in the road, the horses being held by two men, who, when they saw us, ran into the woods towards the river." [Pg 69]

"How were they dressed?" asked the chief officer.

"One of them had garments like thine, friend."

"That's our man, sure!"

"Very presently," resumed the Quaker, "came thy master, using much unseemly language, who, having heard our story, followed the men in the direction we indicated, begging that we guard this carriage till you came, and bidding us tell you to return with it to the town."

"Well, I guess the boss knows his own business best," said the leader of the party; "so we'd better be getting back to the station. I suppose you'll come and give your evidence."

"I am a man of peace," said the Quaker; "but if my testimony is required I and my friends will walk behind thee to the next town and give it."

"It's only half a mile from here, a straight road—you can't miss it. You'll be there as soon as we want you." [Pg 70]

The Quaker nodded.

"Then we'd better be moving," said the chief officer. "I'll drive Maria, and you fellows go ahead in the cart."

The remarks which were now proceeding from the interior of that vehicle were much too dreadful to record. But as it was about to start, the man of peace, lifting his hands, checked the driver and said:

"I will, with thy permission, approach the grating and speak a word of counsel." And going to the door, he said in a loud voice:

"Peace, friend. Remember what the good Benjamin Franklin has said: 'He that speaks much is much mistaken.'"

The reply elicited by these remarks was of such a nature that Miss Arminster was obliged to put her hands over her ears, and the police drove off with loud guffaws, enjoying immensely the good Quaker's confusion.

"That bloke," remarked the tramp, as the Black Maria disappeared in a cloud of dust, "give me three months once, an' I feels better." [Pg 71]

And without another word he led the party across the road and into the woods in the direction of the river. [Pg 72]

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE PARTY RECEIVES A NEW IMPETUS.

An hour later, when the little party of four, weary and dusty, walked up to the hotel at Yonkers, they perceived Tybalt Smith in his shirt-sleeves, with his hat tipped over his eyes as a protection from the rays of the declining sun, lying fast asleep in a large garden chair which was tilted back on its hind legs against the side of the house. Spotts lost no time in poking him in the ribs with his cane, whereupon the tragedian, rousing himself from slumber, hastily assumed a more upright position, bringing the chair down on its front legs with a bang. Having thus been fully awakened, he became at once the master of the situation. [Pg 73]

"We are here," he said.

"So I see," replied Spotts, "and a pretty show you've made of yourself. There's nothing private or retiring about your methods. Now where are the rest of the party?"

Mr. Smith at once assumed an air of mysterious solemnity.

"Mrs. Mackintosh," he said in a stage whisper, "is above. I reserved an apartment for her and the Leop—Miss Arminster, I mean, and a private sitting-room for us all. Mrs. Mackintosh is disturbed. Mrs. Mackintosh requires an explanation. Mrs. Mackintosh," turning to Banborough, "is a woman of great character, of great force, and she requires an explanation of *you!*"

"Ha!" said Spotts, casting a look of mock commiseration at the Englishman.

"Perhaps it might be better," suggested the tragedian, "if Miss Arminster saw her first."

"Perhaps it might," acquiesced Spotts.

"All right, I'll go," said Violet; adding to Cecil, as she passed him: "Don't be frightened; her bark's worse than her bite." And she entered the house laughing. [Pg 74]

"But where are the others?" asked the author.

"Sh!" whispered the tragedian, casting a suspicious glance at the Quaker. "We're not alone."

"Yes," said Spotts, "the Bishop's got a new convert."

"Oh," returned Banborough, "I forgot you hadn't met this gentleman. We inadvertently rescued

him, and since then he's done us a similar service twice over. I really don't know what he's called. The clothes belong to Spotts."

"I thought I recognised the costume," said Smith. Then, turning to the stranger, he demanded, abruptly: "What's your name?"

"I have been known by many," came the suave tones of the Quaker, "but for the purposes of our brief acquaintance thee mayst call me Friend Othniel."

The tragedian gave a grunt of disapproval.

"I think he can be trusted," remarked Spotts. "He's certainly stood by us well, so far. Now tell us about Kerrington and Mill." [Pg 75]

"Yes, I'm most anxious to know what's become of them," said the Englishman. And the three drew nearer together, while the Quaker, turning to the road, stood basking in the sunshine, his broad flabby hands clasped complacently before him.

Tybalt Smith, after casting another furtive glance in Friend Othniel's direction, murmured the words:

"Shoe-strings and a sandwich!"

"Eh? What?" queried Banborough.

"Our two friends," continued the tragedian, "through the powerful aid of a member of our fraternity, whose merits the public have hitherto failed to recognise, have sought refuge in the more humble walks of life to escape the undesirable publicity forced upon them by *you!* Mr. Kerrington, disguised as a Jew pedlar, is now dispensing shoe-strings and collar-buttons on lower Broadway, while Mr. Mill is at present taking a constitutional down Fifth Avenue encased in a sandwich frame calling attention to the merits of Backer's Tar Soap. He is, if I may so express it, between the boards instead of on the boards—a little pleasantry of my own, you will observe." [Pg 76]

The tragedian paused, but failing to elicit the desired laugh, continued his narration:

"Mrs. Mackintosh, though having been offered a most desirable position to hawk apples and chewing-gum on Madison Square, has preferred to share the rigours of an unknown exile, that she might protect the youthful innocence of our leading lady."

"All of which means," said Spotts shortly, "that Mill and Kerrington chose to fake it out in town, while you and the old girl bolted."

"Our friend," remarked Smith, casting an aggrieved look at the last speaker, "is lamentably terse. But let us join Mrs. Mackintosh. She will support my remarks, not perhaps in such chaste diction, but—"

"Oh, shut it off!" interrupted Mr. Spotts. "Come along, Othniel. I guess you're in this, too." And he led the way into the house.

When they entered the private parlour they found Mrs. Mackintosh and Miss Arminster waiting to receive them, the old lady with mingled feelings of righteous indignation and amusement at the ludicrous position in which they were placed, which latter she strove hard to conceal. [Pg 77]

"Well, Bishop," she began, as soon as Banborough was fairly in the room, "you've carried off an innocent and unsuspecting young lady in a Black Maria, imprisoned an officer of the law, deceived his agents, reduced two of the members of our company to walking the streets, forced us to consort with thieves and criminals," pointing to the bland form of the Quaker, who had just appeared in the doorway, "laid us all under the imputation of plotting against our country, exiled us from our native land, brought me away from New York in my declining years, with only the clothes I stand up in, and deposited me in a small room on the third floor of a second-class hotel, which is probably full of fleas! And now I ask you, sir, in the name of Christian decency, which you're supposed to represent, and common sense, of which you've very little, what you're going to do with us?" [Pg 78]

Banborough sat down suddenly on the nearest available chair, made a weak attempt at a smile, gave it up, and blurted out:

"Well, I'm blessed if I know! But permit me to decline the declining years," he murmured gallantly.

"I have," continued the lady, with a twinkle in her eye, "for the past thirty years played blameless parts on the metropolitan stage, and I'm too old to assume with any degree of success the rôle of a political criminal."

"Madam," said the author, making a desperate effort to compose himself, "I'm the first to admit the lack of foresight on my part which has placed us in this deplorable predicament; but the fact remains that we're suspected of a serious crime against this Government, and until we can prove ourselves innocent it's necessary to protect our liberties as best we may. I fortunately have ample funds, and I can only say that it will be a duty as well as a privilege to take you all to a place of safety, and keep you there, as my guests, till happier times." [Pg 79]

"Hear, hear!" said the tragedian from the back of the room, while the Quaker settled himself into

the most comfortable armchair with a sigh of contentment.

"Very nicely spoken, young man," replied the older lady, whose suspicions were only partially allayed, "but words aren't deeds, and Canada, where I'm informed we're to be dumped, is a long way off; and if you imagine you can go cavorting round the country with a Black Maria for a whole afternoon without bringing the police down on you, you're vastly mistaken!"

"Thee speaketh words of wisdom, but a full stomach fortifieth a stout heart," said Friend Othniel.

"Yes," replied Smith, who took this remark to himself. "I ordered dinner at six, thinking you'd be in then, and if I'm not mistaken it's here now." And as he spoke the door opened and a waiter entered to lay the table.

Conversation of a private nature was naturally suspended forthwith, and the members of the A. B. C. Company sat in silence, hungrily eyeing the board. [Pg 80]

"Thee mayst lay a place for me, friend," said the Quaker to the waiter, as he watched the preparations with bland enjoyment.

"Did you order any drinks?" asked Banborough of the tragedian.

"No, Bishop, I didn't," replied the latter. "As you're paying for the show, I thought I'd leave you that privilege."

"Order six soda lemonades," said Banborough to the waiter, adding behind his hand to Spotts, as he noted the gloom spread over the company: "No liquor to-night. We need to keep our wits about us."

"Stop, friend," came the unctuous tones of the Quaker, arresting the waiter as he was about to leave the room. "For myself I never take strong waters, but thee forgettest, Bishop," giving Banborough the title he had heard the others use, "thee forgettest that our revered friend," with a wave of his hand in Mrs. Mackintosh's direction, "hath an affection of her lungs which requires her to take a brandy and soda for her body's good before meals. Let it be brought at once!" [Pg 81]

"Why, you impudent upstart!" gasped the old lady, as the door closed behind the waiter. "How dare you say I drink!"

"Shoo!" returned Friend Othniel, lapsing from the Quaker into the tramp; "I ain't orderin' it for youse. I've a throat like a Sahara."

Then turning to the other members of the company, he continued:

"Now seein' as we've a moment alone, and bein' all criminals, I votes we has a session o' the committee o' ways and means."

A chorus of indignant protest arose from every side.

"Youse ain't criminals, eh? What's liberatin' prisoners, an' stealin' two hosses an' a kerridge, an' the driver's hat an' coat, with a five-dollar bill in the pocket?"

Banborough rose to deny vehemently the last assertion.

"Oh, yes, ther' was," continued the tramp. "I got that." And he produced a crisp note at the sight of which the Englishman groaned, as he realised the damning chain of evidence which circumstance was building up around them. [Pg 82]

"An' lockin' up officers of the law," Friend Othniel went on, "an' runnin' off with prisoners, specially a tough like me, one o' your pals, what's wanted particular." And he winked villainously.

"I do not see," began Banborough, who was fast losing his temper, "that there's any need of discussing the moral aspect of this affair. You," turning to the tramp, "will have your dinner and your drink, and a certain sum of money, and you'll then kindly leave us. Though your nature may be incapable of appreciating the difference between a crime knowingly committed and one innocently entered into, a difference exists, and renders further association between us undesirable, to say the least."

"Oh, it does, does it?" said Friend Othniel. "Well, that's where youse blokes is mistook. This mornin' my dearest ambition was to blow up Madison Square Garden, but what's that to wreckin' a whole nation? No, Bishop, I'm a political conspirator from this time on, and I'll stand by yer through thick and thin! Why, you people ain't no more fitted to run a show o' this sort than a parcel of three-weeks-old babies. I wouldn't give yer ten hours to land the whole crowd in jail; but you just trust to me, and I'll see yer safe, if it can be done. I tell yer, it ain't the fust time I ben in a hurry to view Niagary Falls from the Canadian side." [Pg 83]

Just then the door opened, and the waiter entered with the brandy and soda in a long glass.

"Thee mayst put it here, friend, till the lady is ready to take it," said Othniel, indicating the table at his side.

"Nothing of the kind," snapped Mrs. Mackintosh. "I guess I'm as ready to take it now's I ever shall be." And she grasped the glass and, setting her face, proceeded to drain the tumbler to the amusement of the company. [Pg 84]

"There," she said, wiping her lips with her handkerchief, as the waiter left the room, "that tasted about as bad as anything I've had for a long time; but if it had been castor oil, I'd have drunk every drop rather than that you'd had it."

A general laugh greeted this sally, and the tramp remarked sheepishly that he guessed he'd know it the next time he ran up against her.

Then, waxing serious, he resumed his former topic.

"We ain't got no time to waste in frivolity," he said, "and if we're to get out of this hole, the sooner we makes our plans the better, and perhaps, as I know more about this business than youse, I'll do the talking."

Receiving the silent assent of the company, he continued: "I remembers in the days o' my innocent youth, before I burgled my first watch, a-playin' of a Sunday-school game, where we went out of the room, and the bloke what teached us put a quarter somewhere in plain sight, and when we come in again not one on us could find it, 'cause it was just under our noses; which the same is the game I'm proposing to play."

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"I think I see what you mean," said Banborough. "I've heard it said that the destruction of most criminals is their cleverness."

"That's just what I'm a-tryin' to point out," replied the tramp. "The cops gives you the credit of allus tryin' to do the out-o'-the-way thing, so as to put 'em off the track, while if yer only acted as yer naturally would if yer hadn't done nothin' to be cotched for, yer could walk before their eyes and they'd never see yer."

"That sounds all right," said Spotts. "Now what's your advice?"

"To go back to New York," replied the tramp shortly.

"But," objected Miss Arminster, "we can't stay in the United States."

"Who said we could?" retorted the tramp. "Don't yer see, the cops'll reckon on our takin' some train along hereabouts for the North, and they'll watch all the liddle stations on the up line, but they won't trouble 'bout the down line, 'cause they know we've left the city. So all we has to do, after we've had our dinner comfortable-like, is to take a local back to town, and catch the White Mountain Express for Montreal."

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"Why the White Mountain Express?" asked Mrs. Mackintosh.

"'Cause it's the longest route," replied the tramp, "an' they'll reckon on our takin' the shortest. Besides which, we'll cross the border in the early morning, havin' the baggage, which we ain't got, examined on arrival."

The company expressed hearty approval of the plan, and it was easy to see, in the case of the ladies at least, that Friend Othniel's sagacity had won him a much-improved position in their estimation.

The waiter now came bustling in and out of the room, and Mrs. Mackintosh drew Cecil apart into the embrasure of a window.

"You mustn't think I'm too hard on you, young man," she said, "though I can talk like a house afire when I once get r'iled. I know you didn't mean to get us into this scrape. You're a good-hearted chap, or you wouldn't have given us all a breakfast when you didn't need to, and I want you to understand that I'll stand by you whatever happens. I've taken a real liking to you, because you can look me straight in the eye, and I know you're worth a dozen of those chaps one sees hanging round a theatre; and if you behave yourself nicely, you won't find you've got a better friend than Betsy Mackintosh." And she squeezed his hand with an honest fervour that many a man might have envied.

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Cecil thanked her for her confidence in him, and turned to have a few words with Miss Arminster, who had been constantly in his mind. When she had admitted to the Justice of the Peace that she was a married woman, he felt as if somebody had poured a pitcher of ice-water down his back. Of course he hardly considered his sentiment for her as serious, but he was at the age when a young man feels it a personal grievance if he discovers that a pretty girl is married. Indeed, the fact that the little actress had been so blind to her own interests as not to keep her heart and hand free till he came along first caused him to realise how hard he was hit.

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"I do hope you've not been too much fatigued?" he said, sitting down beside her.

"Oh, you mustn't bother about that," she replied, raising her eyes to his in a decidedly disconcerting manner. "I'm afraid you must have thought me very selfish and ungrateful for seeming to care so much about my own appearance and so little about all you've done for me."

"Oh, don't speak of that," he protested.

"But I must speak of it," she insisted. "I can't begin to tell you how I appreciated it. It was plucky and just splendid, and some day or other I want you to take me out driving again, in another sort of trap. You're the best whip I ever knew."

He flushed under her praise, and began to say pretty things which he had better have omitted;

but she presently became absent-minded in the face of his attentions, and interpreting this as an unfavourable sign, he ventured to ask her why she was so pensive. [Pg 89]

"I'm afraid you must think me awfully rude," she said, "and really I've listened to all the nice things you've been saying, half of which I don't deserve, but the fact is, this place, and even this very room, are full of sweet associations for me. It was in that little church, just across the road, that I was married four years ago."

"But I thought," he began, "that the Justice of the Peace said that he married you."

"So he did," she returned softly, "but that was different—it was later."

"Eh? What!" he said, "later?"

"Yes," she replied dreamily, not noticing the interruption. "But it was here that the few sweet days of my first honeymoon were passed. 'Twas here I became the bride of the only man I've ever loved, the bride of—"

"Hist!" cried the tramp, who had been looking out of the window. "The house is watched!" And with this announcement Banborough's tête-à-tête came to an abrupt close. [Pg 90]

"Are you sure?" cried Spotts.

"Positive. There are three cops fooling round in front now."

"What shall we do?" cried Smith.

"Git," rejoined the tramp.

"But how?" queried Banborough.

"Oh, I'll fix that all right," said the Quaker. "I bagged a plated tea-service here five years ago, and if they ain't changed the arrangements of the house, this side door leads into an unused passage, which, barrin' the climbin' of a picket fence, is very handy for escape."

"But how about the waiter?" suggested Mrs. Mackintosh, who was always practical.

"Right you are," said Friend Othniel. "We'll lock the door before we get out. They'll waste time enough over trying to open it, to give us a chance."

To speak was to act, and the tramp softly turned the key and slipped it into his pocket.

"As a memento," he said. "It's all I'm likely to git. They don't even use plate now." And he fingered the spoons and forks on the table regretfully. [Pg 91]

"Come," said Spotts shortly. "We've no time to lose."

"Look here," said Banborough to the company, "I may be a criminal, but I'm not a sneak, and I don't order meals and apartments without paying for them. How much ought I to leave behind?"

Spotts laughed.

"If you put it that way, I guess ten dollars'll cover it," he said.

The Englishman threw a bill on the table.

"Now," cried Smith, "let's be off!"

"Out this way," said the tramp, opening a side door. "You others go first, and I'll wait here till I sees you're all safe."

"Not if I know it," said Cecil. "You go first, or you'll get kicked."

The tramp looked longingly at the crisp note, and led the way, remarking:

"Thee castest thy pearls before swine, friend."

"Ah, that's just what I'm trying to avoid," said Banborough cheerfully, bringing up the rear. [Pg 92]

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE BISHOP OF BLANFORD RECEIVES A BLACK EYE.

"The Bishop of Blanford!" announced the page, as he threw open the door of Sir Joseph Westmoreland's private consulting-room.

Sir Joseph came forward to meet his distinguished patient, and said a few tactful words about having long known his Lordship by reputation. The Bishop smiled amiably, and surveyed the great London physician through his glasses. The two men were of thoroughly opposite types: Sir Joseph tall, thin, wiry, his high forehead and piercing blue eye proclaiming a powerful mind well trained for the purposes of science; the Bishop short and broad of stature, with an amiable, rounded, ruddy face, and the low forehead which is typical of a complacent dogmatism. [Pg 93]

An ecclesiastic had come to humbug a man of science. Could he do it? Not really, he told himself; but then Sir Joseph was so courteous.

"I ventured to consult you," said his Lordship, in reply to the physician's questions, "because I feel the need of rest, absolute rest. The duties of my diocese are so onerous—and—er—in short—you understand."

"Quite so, quite so," said Sir Joseph, who understood that there was nothing whatever the matter with his patient.

"To be entirely alone," continued the Bishop, "for a space of time, without any distractions—not even letters."

"Most certainly not letters, your Lordship."

"How wonderful you men of science are!" murmured the ecclesiastic. "You understand me exactly. Now if I could have six weeks—or even a month."

"A month, I should say," replied Sir Joseph. "After that you might begin to receive your correspondence."

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"Yes, a month would do—that is—er—where would you advise me to go?"

"What climate generally suits you best?"

"I—er—was thinking of Scotland."

"In May?" queried the physician.

"A friend would lend me his country place—and I—er—should be so entirely alone."

"Quite so. Nothing could be better," replied his adviser, who, like all men who have risen in their profession, had attained an infinite knowledge of human nature.

"And you will be so kind as to write me a note, stating your opinion—about the rest—and—er—immunity from letters—and all that," said the Bishop, depositing with studied thoughtlessness a double fee on the table, "for the benefit of my—my family. She is—they are—I mean—that is, she might not realise the importance of absolute rest, and"—as a brilliant thought occurred to him—"and you'll give me a prescription."

"Certainly," said Sir Joseph. "I'll do both now."

"Thanks," murmured the Bishop, and, receiving the precious documents, he took his leave.

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The great physician's letter he put carefully in an inside pocket; the prescription he never remembered to get filled.

"A month," he said to himself; "that ought to be time enough." And he hailed a cab, and driving promptly to the nearest American steamship office, he engaged a passage forthwith.

"I wonder what Sir Joseph thought about it," he meditated, as he paid for his ticket. In this respect, however, he did his adviser an injustice. Sir Joseph never thought about it at all. It was not part of his profession.

Most people would have united in saying that the Bishop of Blanford was an exceedingly fortunate man. No one was possessed of an estate boasting fairer lawns or more noble beeches, and the palace was a singularly successful combination of ecclesiastical antiquity and nineteenth-century comfort. The cathedral was a gem, and its boy choir the despair of three neighbouring sees, while, owing to a certain amount of worldly wisdom on the part of former investors of the revenues, the bishopric was among the most handsomely endowed in England. Yet his Lordship was not happy. All his life long there had been a blot upon his enjoyment, and that blot was his sister, Miss Matilda Banborough.

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Miss Matilda was blatantly good, an intolerant virtue that accounted for multitudes of sins in other people. Her one ambition was to bring up the Bishop in the way she thought he should go, and hitherto she had been wonderfully successful. All through his married life she had resided at the palace and been the ruling power, and when his wife had died twenty years before, snuffed out by the cold austerity of the Bishop's sister and the ecclesiastical monotony of Blanford, Miss Matilda had assumed the reins of power, and had never laid them down.

The Bishop's wife had been a weak, amiable woman, and her last conscious request was to be buried in the sunlight, but her sister-in-law remarked that "her mind must have been wandering, for though Sarah was vacillating, she was never sacrilegious." So they buried her in the shadiest corner of the cloisters, and put up a memorial brass setting forth all the virtues for which she was not particularly noted, and entirely omitting to mention her saving grace of patience under great provocation.

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Since that time the Bishop's son, Cecil, had been a bone of contention at Blanford. His aunt had attempted to apply the same rigorous treatment to him that had been meted out to his father; but the lad, whose spirit had not been broken, refused to submit. At first, in his boyhood days, his

feeling was chiefly one of awe of Miss Matilda, who always seemed to be interfering with his pleasure, and who made the Sabbath anything but a day of peace for the restless child. Then came long terms at school, with vacations to which he never looked forward, and then four years at the university, when the periods spent at Blanford became more dreaded.

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Cecil tried bringing home friends, but there were too many restrictions. So, after graduation, he drifted off to London, where his aunt prophesied speedy damnation for him, and never quite forgave him because he did not achieve it. During these years his visits to the palace became fewer and fewer. Then he wrote his novel, which proved the breaking-point, for Miss Matilda forced his good-natured, easy-going father to protest against its publication in England, and the young man, in impatient scorn, had shaken the dust of his native country from his feet and departed to the United States, bearing his manuscript with him.

That was a year ago, and Cecil had never written once. His publishers would not give his address, and if he received the letters sent through their agency, he never answered them. His father pined for him. His aunt waxed spiteful, and so firm was her domination over the Bishop that he never dared tell her of his secretly formed plan of going to America to find his son. Hence his visit to the great London physician.

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The little plot worked out better than he could have hoped. Sir Joseph's letter proved convincing, for Miss Matilda had a holy awe of constituted authority, and would no more have thought of disobeying its injunctions than she would of saying her prayers backwards. His Lordship accordingly went to London, and disappeared for a month—ostensibly to Scotland, in reality to America; and no one on the Allan liner suspected for a moment that the little man in civilian's clothes, whose name appeared on the passenger-list as Mr. Banborough, was the Bishop of Blanford.

His thirty days of grace allowed him but two weeks in the States, and here fortune seemed to have deserted him, for, on his arrival, he learned that his son had gone South. A wild-goose chase to Washington consumed much valuable time, and, with only forty-eight hours to spare, he arrived at Cecil's quarters in New York on the day when that young gentleman was madly driving a Black Maria out of the city.

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Discouraged and disheartened at his lack of success, the Bishop took a train for Montreal, and found himself, about ten o'clock on that evening, owing to faulty orders and a misplaced switch, stranded at a little station just on the dividing line between Canada and the United States.

"And when can I proceed on my journey to Montreal?" he queried of the station-master.

"Sure I don't know," responded that individual briefly. "We're bound to get things cleared for the White Mountain Express if possible."

"And when is it due?" asked his Lordship.

"Eleven forty-five A.M., if she's on time."

"I think," said the Bishop, "that I'll remain for the night, and go on at a more seasonable hour tomorrow. Is there any one here who can put me up?"

The station-master scratched his head in perplexity, glancing off to the horizon where glimmered a few lights from scattered farmhouses.

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"I dunno what to say," he replied. "I reckon Deacon Perkins would have put you up," pointing to the nearest light, some mile and a half distant, which at that moment disappeared, "but," added the official, "it looks as if he'd gone to bed. Folks don't stay up late round here. There ain't much to do."

"But," protested his Lordship, "there's a story over this office. Surely you can arrange something for me."

"Well, you see it's this way," said the man. "There's two police officers and a journalist has reserved it for to-night, 'cause they's on the lookout for a batch of prisoners 'scaping to Canada. But if so be's you wouldn't mind sleeping in the refreshment-room, I could let you have a mattress, and make you up a tidy bed under the bar."

The Bishop reflected that, though such quarters were hardly in keeping with the dignity of an episcopal prince, they were better than nothing, and as he was travelling incognito it did not much matter. So he cheerfully accepted, and going out on the platform took a seat on the narrow wooden bench that ran along the front of the station, and lighted a cigar to while away the time till the preparations for his retirement were completed.

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It was pitch-dark outside, and the presence of three glimmering points of light were the only indication of any other occupants of the bench. But he rightly conjectured that the smokers were the policemen and the journalist of whom he had heard, and, having nothing better to do, he entered into conversation with them.

"Oh, yes," said Marchmont, for it was none other, "we've got a big job on hand to-night, sir, if we pull it off."

"Is it uncertain, then?" asked the Bishop.

"Well, of course we don't know which way they're coming. There was a sensational escape of a lot

of Spanish spies from New York this noon. When I left we only knew they'd gone North. Since then they've been heard of near the Hudson River. Of course it's practically certain they'll make for Montreal, as it's the nearest point at which they have a consul, and my knowledge of human nature leads me to think they'll take the most indirect route; so I came on here by the first train, and if we can catch them when the Express comes through to-night, it'll be a great scoop, and certain promotion for me."

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"Who compose the party?" asked his Lordship.

"The whole thing seems to be rather mysterious," said the journalist. "There's a woman conspirator in it, and one or two men, but the identity of the leader, the man who planned the rescue and had the unparalleled audacity to represent himself as one of our reporters, is quite unknown to the police."

"But you?" said the Bishop.

"Oh, I," replied Marchmont, "of course I could hazard a guess as to his identity." And putting his hand before his mouth, so that his two companions should not hear his words, he added, with a tone of triumph in his voice: "There's not the remotest doubt in my mind that the young man who ran off with the Black Maria was none other than the Secretary of the Spanish Legation."

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"Ah," said his Lordship, who was getting bored, "very interesting, I'm sure. I think I'll turn in now. Good-night." And a few minutes later he was safely ensconced under the bar and in the land of dreams, where Miss Matilda and a prison-van figured conspicuously.

After an interval of time, the Bishop was sleepily conscious of the arrival of a train, accompanied by a certain amount of excitement, but it was not till several hours later, when dawn was just beginning to break, that he was rudely awakened by some one attempting to appropriate his resting-place. At the same moment he became conscious that a considerable uproar was going on in the station, and a voice from above, which he recognised as the journalist's, called out:

"Say! One of that gang's in the bar! I saw him come up to the door as I was lying in bed!"

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Before the Bishop, however, became sufficiently wide awake to assimilate thoroughly these astonishing facts, the intruder, who was grotesquely armed with a can of hot coffee and a loaf of bread, deposited his burdens, and falling upon the recumbent ecclesiastic, proceeded to sit upon his head, forcing his face into the pillow, and rendering it impossible for him to utter a single sound. The half light and the suddenness of the attack had not permitted his Lordship to see the features of his aggressor. He had, however, no intention of submitting tamely to such an unpardonable outrage; and when the station-master and the two policemen, unaware of the proximity of the object of their pursuit, had rushed through the room and out at the back door, and the stranger, releasing the Bishop, was preparing to fly also, his Lordship, forgetful of the professions of peace which his calling assumed, smote the intruder lustily in the ribs. He received in return a smashing blow in the eye which made him see a multitude of stars, and before he could recover himself the stranger had seized the coffee and the loaf and dashed through to the front of the station.

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The Bishop staggered to his feet, groping blindly about, while he heard the voice of the journalist, who was leaning over the banisters in night attire, calling vociferously to his companions that the man was escaping by the front.

"Did he hurt you?" he asked of the Bishop.

"Yes," replied his Lordship, still blinded by the force of the blow. "But he got as good as he gave. I didn't have four years of athletics at the 'varsity for nothing."

"Oh, they're sure to catch him," said the journalist

"I hope so," cried the Bishop, "for he richly deserves it."

It is probable, however, that his Lordship would have modified his desire for vengeance had he known that his aggressor was his own son.

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CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH A LINE IS DRAWN AND CROSSED.

"Say, are you asleep?" came the low voice of the tramp at the side of Banborough's berth in the early hours of the morning.

The speaker stood in the aisle of the sleeper and was bending over him, half dressed, the contrast between the sleek outer garments of the Quaker and the rough underwear of the tramp giving him a most grotesque appearance.

"Eh? what?" said Cecil, rousing himself, and noting, as he did so, that it was still dark. A moment later he was fully awake, saying, as he sat up in his bunk: "Is anything the matter?"

"I'm afraid so. We've stopped here more'n ten minutes already, and we're scheduled to run

through."

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"Well, what of it?" said the Englishman, somewhat testily, for he was very weary, and resented having his rest broken. "I suppose it's only a hot box."

"Hot box be blowed! It's us they're after. If you looks round the corner of your curtain, you can see the cops on the platform."

Cecil did as he was bidden, and, drawing back hastily, said:

"You're right. I'm afraid the game is up. Where are we, anyway?"

"If this is the station I take it to be, we're just on the line between the two countries. But whether our car's in Canady or the States is more'n I can tell."

"Is there anything to be done?" asked Banborough, turning to Smith and Spotts, who at this moment quietly joined the Quaker at the Englishman's bedside.

"Plenty," replied Spotts. "It's only a question of going North. Ten feet may mean the difference between a prison and the 'Windsor.'"

"Well, what shall we do?"

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"Are you dressed?"

"All but my boots and coat," answered Cecil. "I'm not enough of a gymnast to disrobe in a space six feet by two, and besides I thought something of this sort might occur."

"Well, get into your boots, then, and don't make any more noise than necessary," said Spotts. "The ladies must be ready by this time. You were called last."

"Are you going to make a bolt for it?" queried Banborough, as he put one foot out of bed.

"Sh!" returned Spotts. "Not so loud! The officials out there on the platform are not sure that we're on board. My suggestion that Mrs. Mackintosh should buy the tickets was a lucky move, as she was not known. I'm going to pull the bell-cord as a sign to start, in the hopes that the engineer will get going before the conductor has time to reverse the signal, which means we'll run to the next station. If we don't succeed in pulling out, we'll just have to jump off and sprint for it."

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"Go ahead," said Banborough. "I'll have my boots on by the time I want them."

The actor took a cautious look round the sleeper. Quiet reigned, except for their own little party, who were by this time all gathered together, the ladies having joined them.

"Now!" said Friend Othniel. And Spotts, reaching up, gave two sharp jerks to the cord which swung from the centre of the car.

Instantly the air-brakes were relaxed, the engine gave forth a series of mighty exhausts, the great driving-wheels spun round for a second on the rails, then caught their grip, and the train began to move out of the station.

A perfect pandemonium at once arose without. Shouts, gesticulations, and the waving of a multitude of lights, but the train still kept on moving, and the last car, in which the fugitives were, was sweeping past the station building, when the conductor, capless, but lantern in hand, emerged from the ticket-office and sprang for the rear platform of the train. A second later the quick jerk of the bell-cord and an answering whistle from the engine told them that he had succeeded in boarding the train and signalling it to stop.

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The Quaker, forgetful of his cloth, swore lustily.

"Come on!" cried Spotts, "we'll have to run for it. They'll back into the station in a minute, and then we're done for." And suiting the action to the word, he rushed down the car towards the front of the train. The rest followed him with the best speed they could muster, falling over boxes and bundles, getting entangled in stray shoes, and running foul of swinging portières. Fortunately the cars were vestibuled, so the platforms offered no impediment. The train seemed absolutely interminable, for as they dashed through sleeper after sleeper, one more always appeared ahead, and Banborough could not help feeling as he ran, hatless and in his shirt-sleeves, with his coat under his arm and one shoe-string untied, that the whole thing must after all be some wildly improbable dream from which he would awake in due course.

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Now they felt the train stand still and then begin slowly to move backwards, which only hastened their flight. But there is an end to everything, and presently the last sleeper had been passed through, and they emerged, hot and breathless, into the baggage-car, immediately behind the engine. Here for the first time they found an open door, the vestibules having all been tightly closed.

Spotts, who led the way, wasted no time in explanation, but making one dash at the burly baggage-master who confronted him, gave him a blow that sent him flying backwards. At the same instant he managed to trip up his assistant, causing the two men to come down on the floor together, bringing with them in their fall two bicycles and half a dozen crates of eggs.

Grasping any light luggage he could seize, Friend Othniel added this to the heap, while Spotts,

throwing open the great door in the side of the car, cried:

"Jump for all you're worth!"

Smith stood cowering on the edge of the door-sill, little relishing the prospect of a wild leap into the night. But the Quaker, who had no time to waste on arguments, smashed down the top bicycle with one hand, thus placing his two opponents on their backs on the floor, and swinging round at the same moment, delivered a kick to the tragedian which sent him flying into outer darkness after the manner of a spread eagle. [Pg 113]

The train was only just moving, and Spotts sprang quickly to the ground, and, running alongside the car, called to Miss Arminster to jump into his arms, which she promptly did. Putting her to one side out of the reach of the train, he ran forward to receive Mrs. Mackintosh; but that good lady, being unaccustomed to such acrobatic feats, and arriving with more force than precision, completely bowled him over, and they went flying into space together. Banborough and Friend Othniel followed almost immediately, and, both trying to get out of the door at the same time, collided with considerable force, and performed a series of somersaults, landing with safety, but emphasis, in a potato-patch. [Pg 114]

As the engine swept by them, Cecil sat up and surveyed the scene. It certainly was an unusual situation, and the half-light of the early morning only served to make their attitudes the more grotesque. The party was scattered at large over the field in question. Smith, on one knee, was rubbing the bruised portions of his body. Miss Arminster, who had landed safely on her feet, was standing with both hands clasped to her head, an attitude suggesting concussion of the brain, but which in reality betokened nothing more dreadful than an utter disarrangement of her hair. Spotts had assumed an unconventional attitude at her feet, while the Quaker, face down, with hands and legs outspread, seemed to be trying to swim due north.

Directly opposite the Englishman, seated erect and prim on what had once been a hill of potatoes, her bonnet perched rakishly on one ear, and her grey toupée partially disarranged, hanging with its sustaining hairpins over her eyes, was Mrs. Mackintosh, firmly grasping in one hand her green silk parasol which she had never relinquished. [Pg 115]

As Banborough met her gaze, she demanded sternly:

"What next, young man, I should like to know?"

"Really, Mrs. Mackintosh," he replied, "if for no other reason, you ought to be deeply indebted to me as a purveyor of new sensations."

"This is not a time for levity, sir," remarked that lady sternly, dropping her parasol and hastily restoring her toupée to its original position, "and I consider it perfectly disgraceful that you should cause a lady of my character to be arrested in a potato-patch at four o'clock in the morning!"

"That's just what I've been endeavouring to prevent," he said. "I believe this to be Canada."

"Then Canada's a very poor sort of a country," she replied snappishly.

The others now approached them, and all eyes were turned to the railroad station a few hundred yards distant, which was alive with bobbing lanterns. Presently a cluster of lights detached itself from the rest and came towards them. [Pg 116]

"Do you think they're going to arrest us?" asked Miss Arminster timidly.

"Don't you be afraid, miss," returned Friend Othniel. "You just let me run this circus, and I'll get you out all right and no mistake."

The party now came up to them. It consisted of the station-master, the conductor, several trainmen, and the two policemen.

"Here!" said the conductor. "What did you mean by pulling the cord and starting the train?"

"Because we was anxious to see the beauties of Canady," replied the tramp.

"Ah, I thought as much," said one of the policemen.

"I am afraid," added the other, "we shall be obliged to persuade you and your party to stay in the United States for a while. You may consider yourselves under arrest." [Pg 117]

"Thank yer," said the tramp sweetly.

"So, to save trouble," continued the officer, "you might as well come back quietly with us to the station."

"Yah!" retorted the tramp. "'Will yer walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly. I knows that game, and I guess the climate o' Canady suits my constitution."

"Nonsense!" replied the policeman. "You aren't over the border by about two miles."

"Oh, ain't we?" said the tramp. "Just oblige me, then, by putting them bracelets which I sees hangin' out o' your pocket on my wrists." And he held out his hands.

The policeman looked sheepish, whispered something to his companion, and presently they

turned their backs on the party and walked away in the direction of the station.

"We's so stuck on this piece o' land," called Friend Othniel after them, "that we thinks o' farmin' it permanently. Come back and spend Christmas with us, won't yer?"

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The officers did not deign to notice these remarks, and a few moments later the train swept by them on its way to Montreal, the baggage-master and his assistant giving their views on the party in general as they passed.

The day now really began to break in earnest, bringing with it a cold, damp chill, which seemed to penetrate to their very marrow. Spotts took off his coat and wrapped it around the shivering Violet—an act of chivalry which made Banborough curse his own thoughtlessness. But Spotts's endeavours to promote the comfort of the company did not end here. He roused Friend Othniel into action, and succeeded in collecting a little stubble and underbrush, and with the aid of a few matches they made an apology for a fire, round which the forlorn party huddled. But, damp with the early dews, the brush gave out more smoke than flame, only serving to emphasize their discomfort.

The increasing light showed them something of their surroundings. At distances varying from a mile to a mile and a half a few dilapidated dwellings peeped out of a fringe of woods. Everything else was pine-swamp, with the exception of the one small field of potatoes in which they were encamped, and which stood out as an oasis in the wilderness. Through the midst of the landscape straggled a muddy road, hopelessly impassable for foot-travellers. Certainly the outlook was not cheering.

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It was therefore with a feeling of positive relief that they perceived shambling towards them the uncouth figure of the station-master. He paused on the edge of the patch, with one hand embedded in his shock of hair, and the other grasping a large piece of chalk, and surveyed the party critically.

"Say," he began after a few moments' silence, "them's my potatoes you're a-settin' on."

The tramp growled something unintelligible, and the others vouchsafed no reply whatsoever.

"I guess it must be purty damp out in that field," continued the station-master, "specially for the ladies, and I thought as how I'd let yer know as I was a-makin' some coffee over to the station, and yer could come and get it if yer liked."

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"Yes, and get arrested into the bargain," said Spotts.

"I thought of that," replied the man, "and so I've drawn a line onto the platform with this piece of chalk, jest where the boundary be, and so long as yer stays to the northard of it yer can't be ketched."

"How are we to know that that is just the boundary?" asked Banborough.

"'Pears to me you're mighty 'spicious. Anyhow, thar's the line and thar's the coffee. Yer can take it or leave it, jest as yer likes."

"I'd make it worth your while to bring it to us down here," said Cecil.

"Humph!" returned the maker of beverages. "I don't go totin' coffee all round the country, and I'd like to remind yer as potatoes ain't eggs and don't need no hatchin', so the sooner you gets through settin' on 'em the better I'll be pleased." And turning his back he slouched away to the station.

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"What do you think about it?" said Banborough to Spotts.

"I think it's a plan," replied the actor. "A New England farmer never misses a chance of making a penny when he can do so, and that fellow would have been glad enough to sell his coffee to us at a fancy price anywhere we chose to drink it if he hadn't been offered more to entice us up to the station."

"Well, I'm not going to pass the rest of my days on top of a potato-hill," said Mrs. Mackintosh spitefully. "I'm so stiff now I can hardly move."

"Yes, I don't think there's much to wait for," agreed Cecil. "But where shall we go?"

"To the next station, I guess," said the tramp. "But in Canady that's as likely to be thirteen miles as it is two, and this track ain't ballasted for a walking-tour."

The fair Violet heaved a deep sigh.

"What is it?" asked Banborough anxiously. "Don't you feel well?"

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"I do feel a little faint," she replied, "but I dare say I'll be better in a minute. I shouldn't have sighed, only I was thinking what an old wretch that station-master is, and how good that coffee would have tasted."

"You shall have some," he said, determined not to be outdone again by Spotts, "and I'll get it for you myself."

"No, no!" she protested. "I didn't mean that. I shouldn't have said it. I wouldn't have you go for

worlds. You'd surely be arrested."

"Nonsense!" he replied. "I think I can manage it and get back safely, and you and Mrs. Mackintosh must have something sustaining, for you've a long walk before you." And, in spite of all remonstrances, he prepared to set out on his delicate and dangerous mission.

"What's your plan?" asked Friend Othniel, immensely interested now there was a chance of an adventure.

"I'm going to crawl along in the dry ditch beside the railroad track till I get up to the station, and then trust to luck. I used to be able to do a hundred yards in pretty decent time in my Oxford days, and if I can get into the refreshment-room without being seen, I don't think they'll catch me."

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"Well, good luck to yer," said the tramp, "and if yer should come across a hunk of pumpkin pie, don't forget your friend Othniel."

Banborough slipped off his overcoat, and donning a pair of heavy dogskin gloves, the property of the driver of the Black Maria, which the tramp produced, he watched his opportunity when no one was in sight at the station, and, cautioning the rest of the party not to betray by their actions that anything unusual was going on, stole across the open field and, dropping into the shallow ditch, began his perilous journey.

Within three feet of the edge of the platform all means of concealment ceased; but feeling that a bold course was the only one which gave any hope of success, Cecil rose quickly, and, slipping across the exposed place in an instant, glided into the great woodshed which in that part of the world, where coal is expensive, forms an important adjunct to every station. He felt himself practically secure here, as no one was likely to come for logs so early in the morning; and after waiting for a few moments to make certain that his presence had not been discovered, he threw himself down on his face, and, crawling noiselessly on all-fours across the twenty feet of open platform which intervened between the woodshed and the main building, achieved the precarious shelter afforded by the side wall of the house. He then wormed himself forward till he was close to the front corner; and here his patient efforts were at last rewarded, for he heard a few scraps of a conversation which, had he been in a less dangerous position, would have afforded him infinite amusement.

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"I tell you what it is," came the strident voice of the station-master. "It ain't no mortal manner of use. Why, they spotted me to onct; said how was they to know I drawed the line correct."

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"Ha!" said one of the policemen. "Couldn't you go out and dicker with them some more?"

"Nope," rejoined the other shortly. "And there's that whole tin o' coffee in the back room goin' to waste, and I guess they'd have paid more'n a dollar for it."

"Where's Mr. Marchmont?" asked the second speaker, a remark which caused Banborough considerable surprise.

"He's been keepin' out o' the way o' them Spaniards," said the station-master, "lest they should get a sight of him, 'cause he may have to shadow 'em in Canady, and he don't want 'em to get on to who he is. He's gone upstairs now to get a snooze, an' that's where I'm goin', too. There ain't no train for three hours, and I've had enough o' this durned foolishness."

"What's that?" cried the policeman, as a sharp sound smote their ears.

"Tain't nothin' but the back door slammin'," replied the other. "I must ha' forgot to latch it. The wind's riz a bit."

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"Yes," said the officer, "and it's going to rain presently."

"I guess I'd better go and shet that door."

"No, you stay here; I want to talk to you. We'll let them get thoroughly drenched, and you can offer them the hospitality of the woodshed. Maybe we could alter the boundary-line a few feet in the interests of justice."

Banborough waited to hear no more, but, drawing softly back, sprang to his feet and ran noiselessly along the side of the house and round to the unlatched door behind. Now, if ever, was his chance. He dashed into a room which seemed to be a combination of kitchen and bar, but on the stove stood a steaming tin can of savoury coffee, while among the bottles on the shelf, just showing out of its paper wrappings, was a goodly loaf of white bread. Had he left well alone, and been satisfied with the coffee, he would have been all right; but the bread tempted him, and to obtain possession of it he must go behind the bar. This he hastened to do, unlatching the little swinging gate at the end, when a scuffling sound from the room above gave place to heavy foot-falls on the boards, and a moment later Marchmont called down the stairs which evidently led into the front room:

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"Say! One of that gang's in the bar! I saw him come up to the door as I was lying in bed!" A bit of information which was instantly followed by a clatter of chairs on the front platform.

Wedged in behind the bar, Banborough felt himself trapped. But a happy inspiration seizing him, he possessed himself of the can of coffee and, with the loaf of bread in his other hand, crawled under the protecting shelf, while just at that moment a particularly strong gust of wind blew the

unlatched door wide open, banging it back against the wall.

To his intense astonishment, Cecil found his hiding-place already occupied by the recumbent and sleeping form of a man, and, jumping to the conclusion that he must be either a policeman or a detective, he promptly sat upon his head with a view to suppressing any inopportune remarks. A second later three men rushed into the room, and Banborough held his breath. But luck was with him, for one glance at the empty stove and the open door satisfied the station-master, who cried:

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"Those fellows has bolted with the coffee!" and dashed out at the back, followed by the policemen.

In a second Cecil was up and out of the bar, but not before he had received a smashing blow in the ribs from the stranger he had so rudely awakened. He promptly struck out in return, and from the sputtering and thrashing sounds which emanated from under the shelf he judged that his blow had gone home.

Snatching up the coffee and the bread, he dashed through to the front of the house, and, emerging on the platform, saw a sight which filled his heart with joy. On the track stood one of those little flat cars, employed by section-men, which is propelled by means of a wheel and crank in the centre turned by hand, on the same principle as a velocipede.

He sprang upon it, deposited his precious burden, and began turning the crank with feverish energy. To his joy, the car at once started forward, and under his well-directed pressure went rattling out of the station, shooting by his three astonished pursuers as they rounded the corner of the woodshed. Two minutes later he arrived in triumph at the potato-patch, being warmly welcomed by his admiring companions, who forthwith fell to and made a satisfying, if frugal, meal.

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Just as they were finishing, the station-master came up, and, being rendered thoroughly amiable by a liberal recompense for the stolen viands, so far forgot himself, in his appreciation of Banborough's pluck, as to admit that there was no objection to their taking the flat car on to the next station, provided they could square it with the superintendent on arrival, as there were no trains due either way.

"How far is the next station?" asked Cecil, as the party clambered on to the car.

"About twelve miles," said Miss Arminster.

"Do you know it?" asked Banborough, still glowing under her praises of his prowess.

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"Oh, yes," she replied softly. "I was married there last June."

The Englishman, muttering something under his breath, seized the handles and, giving them a vicious turn, sent the car spinning northwards.

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CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH A LOCKET IS ACCEPTED AND A RING REFUSED.

Something over a week after the events narrated in the last chapter, Banborough was lounging in the office of the Windsor Hotel at Montreal. The course of events had run more smoothly for the party since the day they arrived in the city, weary and travel-stained with their adventurous trip. Montreal in general, and the manager of the Windsor in particular, were accustomed to see travellers from the States appear in all sorts of garbs and all kinds of conditions incident to a hasty departure, so their coming occasioned little comment; and as Cecil never did things by halves, they were soon rehabilitated and installed in the best apartments the hotel could offer.

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The various members of the party, after the first excitement was over, had relapsed into a listless existence, which, however, was destined to be rudely disturbed, for while the Englishman's thoughts were wandering in anything but a practical direction, he was aroused from his reverie by a well-known voice, and, turning, found himself face to face with Marchmont.

"Well, who on earth would have thought of seeing you here?" exclaimed the journalist. "Have you fled to Canada to escape being lionised?"

"No," said Banborough cautiously, "not exactly for that reason."

"We couldn't imagine what had become of you," continued his friend. "You're the hero of the hour in New York, I can tell you, and 'The Purple Kangaroo' is achieving the greatest success of the decade."

"Oh, confound 'The Purple Kangaroo—'!"

"That's right; run it down. Your modesty becomes you. But seriously, old man, let me congratulate you. You must be making heaps out of it."

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"Let's talk about something else," said Banborough wearily, for he was heartily sick of his unfortunate novel. "You ask me why I'm here. I'll return the compliment. Why are you?"

"Why," returned Marchmont, "you're partially to blame for it, you know. I'm after those Spanish conspirators. Of course you've heard the story?"

"No," said Banborough. "I haven't been in town for a fortnight. What is it?"

"Well, we arrested a lovely señorita on Fourteenth Street who was using the title of your novel as a password. I can tell you confidentially that there's no doubt that she's one of the cleverest and most unscrupulous female spies in the Spanish secret service; and while they were deciding where to take her, a stranger, who we're certain was one of the Secretaries of their Legation, eloped with her, Black Maria and all, with the recklessness of a true hidalgo. They were joined by a band outside the city, where they overcame a Justice of the Peace who arrested them, after a desperate resistance on his part. The story of this unequal battle was one of the finest bits of bravery we've had for years.

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"After dining at a hotel at Yonkers they held up the waiter with revolvers and escaped. Similar audacities were perpetrated at the boundary-line between the United States and Canada, and in spite of the most intelligent and valiant efforts on the part of the police, aided by our own special corps of detectives, they've so far eluded us. Their leader's said to be a perfect devil, who, as I tell you, is certainly a Secretary of the Spanish Legation."

"How do you know that?" asked Banborough.

"Ah," said Marchmont, looking wise and shaking his head, "the *Daily Leader* has private sources of information. I wonder you've not heard anything of this."

"Yes," acquiesced the Englishman, "it *is* curious, isn't it?"

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"But," continued his friend, "you haven't told me yet why you came to Montreal."

"Well," said Cecil, laughing, "I can at least assure you that my trip here has been much less eventful than the one you described."

"By the way," said the journalist, "have you seen the last editorial about your book in the *Daily Leader*?"

The Englishman shook his head.

"No? Well, here goes." And Marchmont began to read forthwith:

"English conservatism has recently received a shock from the scion of Blanford, and the Bishop's son, in connection with 'The Purple Kangaroo,' has caused the British lion to hump himself into the hotbed of American politics—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Cecil, with more force than politeness.

"Don't you like it?" exclaimed the journalist. "There's a column and a half more. I blue-pencilled a copy and sent it over to your old man."

Banborough groaned.

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"But," continued Marchmont, "this isn't anything to what we'll do when we've hounded the Dons out of Canada."

"What?" cried the author.

"Yes," went on his friend. "We've complained to your Foreign Office, and within a week every Spanish conspirator will receive notice to quit Her Majesty's North American colonies on pain of instant arrest and deportation."

Cecil waited to hear no more, but, pleading an imperative engagement, rushed away to summon the members of his party to a hurried council of war in their private sitting-room. All were present with the exception of Miss Arminster, who had gone to spend the day at a convent in the suburbs, where she had been brought up as a child.

After an hour of useless debating the council ended, as Banborough might have foreseen from the first, in the party giving up any solution of the problem as hopeless, and putting themselves unreservedly in his hands to lead them out of their difficulties. Cecil, who felt himself ill equipped for the rôle of a Moses, jammed his hat on his head, lit his pipe, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, said he was going out where he could be quiet and think about it.

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"Going to the Blue Nunnery, he means," said Smith, laughing, and nudging Spotts.

The actor grunted. Apparently the author's attentions to the fascinating Violet did not meet with his unqualified approval.

An hour later Banborough stood in the grey old garden of the nunnery, the sister who was his guide silently pointing out to him the figure of the little actress, whose bright garments were in striking contrast to the severe simplicity of her surroundings. When the Englishman turned to thank the nun, she had disappeared, and he and Miss Arminster had the garden to themselves.

She stood with her back to him, bending over some roses, unconscious of his presence, and for a few moments he remained silent, watching her unobserved. The ten days which had passed had done much to alter his position towards her, and he had come to fully realise that he was honestly

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in love with this woman. Even the fact of her having been married at Ste. Anne de Beau Pré, which information he had elicited from her on the occasion of their pilgrimage to that shrine a few days before, had not served to cool his ardour. Indeed, the fact that his suit seemed hopeless made him all the more anxious to win her for his wife.

After he had been watching her for some minutes, a subtle intuition seemed to tell her of his presence, and he approached her as she raised her face from the roses to greet him.

"I came to see you—" he began, and paused, hardly knowing how to continue.

"Am I not then allowed even one holiday?" she asked.

"Is my presence so much of a burden?" he inquired, realising for the first time the full force of what her statement implied, as a hurried mental review of the past fortnight showed him that he had scarcely ever been absent from her side. Indeed, it no longer seemed natural not to be with her.

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"Oh, I didn't mean to be rude," she said, "but I do like a day out of the world occasionally. You know, when I come back here I forget for the time that I've ever lived any other life than that which is associated with this dear old place."

He thought grimly that a young lady who had been married four times before she was twenty-five must have to undergo a considerable amount of mental obliteration.

"I think you'd tire of it very soon if you had to live here always," he said.

"I'm not sure," she replied. "I think—but of course you wouldn't understand that—only, life on the stage isn't all bright and amusing, and there are times when one simply longs for a quiet, old-world place like this."

"I believe you'd like Blanford," he suggested.

"I should love it," she assured him. "But what would your father say to me? I'd probably shock him out of his gaiters—if he wears them. Does he?"

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"I suppose so," said Cecil. The fact was that the raiment of the Bishop of Blanford did not particularly interest him at that moment. He had more important things to talk about, things that had no connection whatsoever with the immediate future of the A. B. C. Company. Yet the mention of his father caused him to stop and think, and thought, in this case, proved fatal to sentiment. He thrust his hands into his pockets and addressed himself to the more prosaic topics of life, saying:

"My excuse for intruding on you is that our troubles are by no means over. The authorities, not content with driving us out of the United States, are preparing to order us out of Canada as well, and the question of where we are to go is decidedly perplexing."

"Oh, dear!" said the little woman, "I think I'll go into the convent after all."

"That settles the difficulty as far as you're concerned. Do you think they'd admit me?"

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"Don't talk nonsense. What do the others say?"

"Oh, they say a good many things, but nothing practical, so I came to you for advice."

"Well, to speak frankly," she replied, "if I were you, I'd drop us all and run away home. It's much the easiest solution of the difficulty."

"Excuse me," he said. "I'm a gentleman, and besides—"

"Well, what?"

"Besides," he continued, thinking it better to be discreet, "I doubt if I should be welcome. I've a letter from the governor in my pocket, which I haven't yet had courage to open. I dare say it won't be pleasant reading; besides which, it's been chasing me round the country for the last five or six weeks, and must be rather ancient history."

"Look at it and see," she advised. "They may be ready to kill the fatted calf for you, after all."

"I'm afraid they do regard me rather in the light of a prodigal," he admitted. "However, here goes." And breaking the seal of the envelope, he read the letter aloud:

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"THE PALACE,

BLANFORD.

"MY DEAR SON:

"Do you realise that it is nearly a year since your Aunt Matilda and I have received news of you? This has been a source of great grief and pain to both of us, but it has not moved me to anger. It has rather caused me to devote such hours as I could spare from the preparation of my series of sermons on the miracle of Jonah to personal introspection, in the endeavour to discover, if possible, whether the cause of our estrangement lay in any defect of my own.

"It may be that you achieve a certain degree of spiritual enlightenment in

producing a book entitled 'The Purple Kangaroo.' I hope so, though I have not read it. Nor do I wholly agree with your good aunt, who contends that the title savours too much of the Apocrypha, and I say nothing of the undesirable popularity you seem to have attained in the United States. I only ask you to come home.

"As a proof of her reconciliation, your aunt included a copy of your book in her last mission box to the Ojibway Indians. I shall always be glad to receive and make welcome any of your friends at the palace, no matter how different their tastes and principles may be to my own well-defined course of action.

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"In the hope of better things,

"YOUR

AFFECTIONATE FATHER."

"Of course you'll go," Violet said softly.

"Oh, I don't know about that," he replied.

"I do," she returned. "It's your duty. What a dear old chap he must be!—so thoroughly prosy and honest. I'm sure I should love him. I know just the sort of man he is. A downright Nonconformist minister of the midland counties, who was consecrated a Bishop by mistake."

Cecil paused a minute, thinking it over.

"How about the others?" he said.

"Ah, yes," she replied, "the others. But perhaps you don't class them as your friends."

"Oh, it isn't that," he answered. "Only I was wondering—"

"What the Bishop would say?" she asked, looking at him with a roguish smile. "Well, why not take him at his word and find out." [Pg 144]

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I will! I believe you've hit on the very best possible solution of our difficulty. The episcopal palace at Blanford is absolutely the last place in the world where any one would think of looking for a political conspirator, and, by some freak of fortune, the police are entirely ignorant that I'm in any way connected with your flight."

"Good! then it's settled!" she cried. "And we'll all accompany you."

"Ye-es, only the governor wouldn't go within a hundred yards of a theatre, and my aunt calls actors children of—I forget whom—some one in the Old Testament."

"Belial," suggested Miss Arminster.

"That's it. How did you know?"

"You forget," she said, "I was brought up in a convent."

"It'll never do," he continued, "for them to suspect who you really are."

"Are we not actors?"

"Of course. We must have a dress rehearsal at once, and cast you for your parts. But there's Friend Othniel—" [Pg 145]

"Ah, yes," she said. "He's impossible."

"We must drop him somehow."

"That's easily managed," she replied. "Pay his hotel bill, and leave him a note with a nice little cheque in it to be delivered after we've gone."

"Then we must get away quickly, or he'll suspect."

"The sooner the better."

"I noticed that there was a ship sailing from Montreal for England this afternoon."

"That'll just suit our purpose," she said. "Friend Othniel told me he was going to walk up Mount Royal after lunch and wouldn't be back before six."

"And you'll really come to Blanford?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Of course," she said. "Why should you doubt it?"

"Because," he replied, "it seems too good to be true. I was thinking, hoping, that perhaps I might persuade you to come there for good, and never go away." [Pg 146]

"Ah," she interrupted him, "you're not going to say that?"

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because we've been such friends," she answered, "and it's quite impossible."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. And oh, I didn't want you to say it."

"But can't we be friends still?" he insisted.

"With all my heart, if you'll forget this mad dream. It would have been impossible, even if I were free. Your people would never have accepted me, and I would only have been a drag on you."

"No, no!" he denied vehemently.

"There," she said, "we won't talk about it. You've been one of the best friends I ever had, and—what's in that locket you wear?"

"That?" he replied, touching a little blue-enamelled case that hung from his watch-chain. "It has nothing more interesting in it at present than a picture of myself. But I'd hoped—" [Pg 147]

"Give it to me, will you," she asked, "in remembrance of to-day?"

He detached it silently from his chain, and, pressing it to his lips, placed it in her hand.

"I'll always wear it," she said.

There was an awkward silence for a moment, and then, pulling himself together, he remarked brusquely:

"I suppose we'd better be starting for town."

"I'll join you later," she replied. "I want to go to mid-day service in the little church next to this convent. Such a pretty little church. I was married there once."

"You were what? Are you really serious, Miss Arminster?"

"Perfectly," she answered, giving him a bewitching little smile as she tripped out of the garden. [Pg 149]

PART II.

ENGLAND.

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH MRS. MACKINTOSH ADMIRES JONAH.

"I think, Matilda, that you must have neglected to put any sugar in my tea," said the Bishop of Blanford, pushing his cup towards his sister, after tasting the first mouthful.

"You're quite right, Josephus, I did," she replied.

"And," continued his Lordship, who, being near-sighted, was poking about, after the manner of a mole, in the three-storied brass bird-cage which held the more substantial portion of the repast, "there doesn't seem to be any cake."

"You forget," said Miss Matilda sternly, "that it's an ember-day."

Her brother said nothing, and took a mouthful of the tea, which, like the morality of the palace, was strong and bitter. But his ample chest expanded with just the slightest sigh of regret, causing the massive episcopal cross of gold filigree, set with a single sapphire, which rested thereon, to rise and fall gently. Miss Matilda's hawklike eye saw and noted this as the first slight sign of rebellion, and she hastened to mete out justice swift and stern, saying: [Pg 152]

"You remember, Josephus, that there's a special service at the mission church at five, at which I consider you ought to be present."

His Lordship had not forgotten it, or the circumstance that the afternoon was exceedingly hot, and that the mission church, which was situated in an outlying slum, was made of corrugated tin. The palace garden would have been infinitely preferable, and he knew that had he accepted sugarless tea without a murmur, his chaplain would have sweltered in his place. As it was, he submitted meekly, and his sister gazed at him with a satisfied expression of triumph across her bright green tea-cloth. If Miss Matilda had a weakness, it was for ecclesiastical tea-cloths. White was reserved for Sundays and feast-days; on ordinary occasions, at this time of the year, her ritual prescribed green. [Pg 153]

They were seated in the garden of the palace, a peaceful Arcadia which it was difficult to realise was only separated from a dusty and concrete world by a battlemented wall which formed the horizon. The sky overhead was so blue and cloudless that it might have formed the background for an Italian landscape, and framed against it was the massive tower of the cathedral, its silver-greys darkening almost to black, as a buttress here and there brought it in shadow. Among its

pinnacles a few wise old rooks flapped lazily in the still air, as much a part of their surroundings as the stately swans that floated on the stream which lapped the foot of the tower, while on all sides there stretched away a great sweep of that perfect verdure which only England knows.

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"It's nearly two months since I last wrote to Cecil," said the Bishop, judging it wise to change the trend of the conversation, "and I've not heard a word."

"I'm sure I should be surprised if you had," snapped Miss Matilda. "And what your sainted Sarah would have felt, had she lived to see her son's disgraceful career, makes me shudder."

The Bishop started to sigh again. Then, thinking better of it, stopped. He had returned to Blanford from his rest-cure a week before, and apparently the air of Scotland had not proved as beneficial as he had expected.

"I believe that Cecil will come back to us," he said, ignoring his sister's last remark. "I told him that his friends would be welcome here in future, and I particularly mentioned that you'd put a copy of his book in your last missionary box."

"I hope you didn't neglect to say that I tore out all the pictures. A more scandalous collection—"

But she never finished her denunciation of the novel, for just at that moment the Bishop sprang to his feet with a glad cry of "Cecil!"

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The young man came running across the lawn to meet his father, seizing him warmly by the hand, and having administered a dutiful peck to his aunt, turned to introduce the little group of strangers who had accompanied him.

"Father," he said, "these are my friends. On the strength of your letter I've taken the liberty of asking them to be my guests as well."

"They're very welcome to the palace," said the Bishop.

Cecil turned, and leading the two ladies forward, presented them to his father and his aunt. Miss Matilda swept them both with a comprehensive glance, and addressing Mrs. Mackintosh, remarked:

"Your daughter, I presume," indicating Miss Arminster. Whereupon the good lady coloured violently and denied the fact.

"Your niece?" insisted Miss Matilda, who was an excellent catechist, as generations of unfortunate children could bear witness.

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"A young lady whom I'm chaperoning in Europe," replied Mrs. Mackintosh stiffly, in an effort to be truthful, and at the same time to furnish Violet with a desirable status in the party.

The tragedian was now brought forward.

"Allow me," said Banborough, in pursuance of a prearranged scheme of action—"allow me to introduce my friend Professor Tybalt Smith. You, father, are of course acquainted with his scholarly work on monumental brasses."

The Bishop naturally was not conversant with the book in question, because it had never been written, but he was entirely too pedantic to admit the fact; so he smiled, and congratulated the Professor most affably on what he termed "his well-known attainments," assuring him that he would find in the cathedral a rich field of research in his particular line of work.

Spotts was now brought up, and introduced as a rising young architect of ecclesiastical tendencies, which delighted his Lordship immensely as there was nothing he liked better than to explain every detail of his cathedral to an appreciative listener.

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"I've a bit of old dog-tooth I shall want you to look at to-morrow," said his host, "and there's some Roman tiling in the north transept that absolutely demands your attention."

Spotts smiled assent, but was evidently bewildered, and seizing the first opportunity that offered, asked Cecil in a low voice if his father took him for a dentist or a mason.

"For a dentist or a mason?" queried Banborough. "I don't understand."

"Well, anyway, he said something about looking after his old dog's teeth and attending to his tiles."

Cecil exploded in a burst of laughter, saying:

"That's only the architectural jargon, man. You must play the game."

"Oh, I see," said the actor. "It's about his ramshackle old church. Well, I'll do my best—" But his assurances were cut short by the flow of his Lordship's conversation.

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"As I was saying, Mr. Spotts," he continued, "I should be much interested to hear your American views on the subject of a clerestory."

"Sure," replied the actor, plunging recklessly. "I always believe in having four clear stories at least, and in New York and Chicago we run 'em up as high as—" But here a premonitory kick from Cecil brought his speech to an abrupt termination.

"Most astonishing," commented his Lordship. "I've never heard of more than one."

"Oh, our Western churches are chock-full of new wrinkles."

"Of new—what? I don't understand. Another cup' of tea for you, Mrs. Mackintosh? Certainly. We must pursue this subject at leisure, Mr. Spotts."

The party now turned their attention to the repast, and the Bishop proceeded to devote himself to Mrs. Mackintosh.

"I'm afraid," he said, when he had seen her sufficiently fortified with tea containing a due allowance of sugar, and supplemented by a plateful of cake which he had ordered to be brought as a practical substitute for the scriptural calf—"I'm afraid you will find our simple life at Blanford very dull." [Pg 159]

"Dear sakes, no!" said that lady, hitching her chair up closer to the Bishop for a confidential chat—an action on her part which elicited a flashing glance of disapproval from Miss Matilda.

"I've heard all about you," she went on, "from your son Cecil. You don't mind if I call him Cecil, do you? for I'm almost old enough to be his mother. Well, as I was saying, when he told me about the cathedral and the beeches and the rooks and you, all being here, hundreds of years old—"

"Excuse me, madam," said his Lordship, "I'm hardly as aged as that."

"Of course I didn't mean you, stupid! How literal you English are!"

It is highly probable that in all the sixty years of his well-ordered existence the Bishop of Blanford had never been called "stupid" by anybody. He gasped, and the episcopal cross, and even the heavy gold chain by which it depended from his neck, were unduly agitated. Then he decided that he liked it, and determined to continue the conversation. [Pg 160]

"When I thought of all that," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "I said to your son: 'Cecil,' said I, 'your father's like that old board fence in my back yard; he needs a coat of whitewash to freshen him up, and I'm going over to put it on.'"

"Cromwell," remarked the Bishop, "applied enough whitewash to Blanford to last it for several centuries. Indeed, we've not succeeded in restoring all the frescoes yet."

"Nonsense, man," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "you don't see the point at all. Now what do you take when your liver's out of order?"

"Really, madam," faltered the Bishop, thoroughly aghast at this new turn in the conversation, "I—er—generally consult my medical adviser."

"Well, you shouldn't!" said Mrs. Mackintosh with determination. "You should take what we call in my country a pick-me-up. Now I said to your son: 'I'm going to be a mental and moral pick-me-up for your father. What he needs is a new point of view. If you don't take care, he'll fossilise, and you'll have to put him in the British Museum.'" [Pg 161]

The Bishop's reflections during this conversation were many and varied. What he was pleased to term his inner moral consciousness told him he ought to be shocked at its flippancy; the rest of his mental make-up was distinctly refreshed. Besides, a certain tension in the social atmosphere suggested that Miss Matilda was about to go forth to battle, so he smiled graciously, saying:

"It's certainly very considerate of you to undertake all this on my account, but I should not like to be in any one's debt, and I hardly see how I can repay my obligations."

"I'm just coming to that," said Mrs. Mackintosh. "I don't say that I shouldn't be doing a Christian act by taking you in hand, but I'm free to admit that I've a personal interest in the matter, for you're the one man in England I most wanted to meet." [Pg 162]

"But what can there possibly be about me—" began the Bishop.

"It isn't about you," replied his guest. "It's about Jonah."

"Josephus," broke in the harsh voice of his sister, "the bell of the mission chapel has been ringing for some time."

The Bishop drew a long breath and formed a mighty resolve. At last he had met a person who took an intelligent interest in Jonah, a Biblical character to whose history he had devoted exhaustive research. It was a golden opportunity not to be let slip. So, turning to his sister and looking her squarely in the eyes, he replied boldly that he was quite aware of the fact.

"If you do not go at once you'll be late," remarked that lady.

"I've not the slightest intention of going at all," said the Bishop. "I'm talking to Mrs. Mackintosh, who is, it seems, much interested in Jonah." [Pg 163]

There came a sound as of spluttering from the upraised tea-cup of Professor Tybalt Smith, and Miss Matilda gave a distinctly aggressive sniff.

"If you're not going, Josephus," she retorted, "I must send word to one of the chaplains, though after what you had said I naturally—" But there she paused, arrested by the incredible fact that for the first time in her experience her brother was not listening to what she was saying. Her

silence commanded his attention.

"Oh," he replied, looking up vacantly, "do what you think proper," and turned again to Mrs. Mackintosh, who proceeded placidly with her theme.

"Of course," she said, "you hear a lot about seeing with the eye of faith, but I like to see with the eye of understanding, too, and I never yet sat under a preacher who was what I should call 'up to Jonah.' I read your book when it came out. It was one of the prizes they offered for selling on commission fifty packets of Tinker's Tannin Tea, and I've been wild to meet you ever since. I have been a-whaling, so to speak, for years, but I expect you to carry me safely into port."

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"Madam," said the Bishop, "you overwhelm me." He was immensely flattered by her appreciative, if outspoken, commendation. "I'm now," he continued, "at work on a set of supplementary sermons on this very subject; and if it wouldn't be imposing too much on your good nature to let me read them to you, or parts of them—they embrace some six hundred pages."

Mrs. Mackintosh looked at him regretfully.

"Isn't there any more than that?" she said. "I wanted three volumes at least."

The Bishop beamed with gratification.

"I trust," he replied, "that they'll be worthy of your attention. But my treatment of the subject is—er—slightly doctrinal, and perhaps you're not a member of the Church of England."

"Well, no," said Mrs. Mackintosh. "I can't say as I am. I was baptised a Methodist, brought up in a Roman Catholic convent, finished at a Presbyterian boarding-school, and married before a Justice of the Peace to a Unitarian, and since I've been a widow I've attended a Baptist church regularly; but I don't believe I'd mind a few weeks of an Episcopalian, specially seeing he's a Bishop, which I haven't experienced before."

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"I shall endeavour to do my best, madam," said his Lordship. "Perhaps I may even lead you—in time—"

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised but what you might," replied Mrs. Mackintosh, "but I mustn't take up all your time. I want you to know my little friend Miss Arminster. She's one of the nicest girls that ever was."

"I shall be delighted," said his Lordship. "Arminster," he continued reflectively. "Does she come from the Arminsters of Shropshire?"

Mrs. Mackintosh laughed.

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied, "but from the way her friends speak of her, you'd think she came from Noah's Ark."

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"Dear me!" said the Bishop. "That's very curious."

"They call her the Leopard," she went on, "and I must say for my part that I'm 'most as fond of the Leopard as I am of Jonah's whale." And she rose and joined the group about the tea-table, for she did not wish to try Miss Matilda's patience too far.

"I don't know what you'll think of our quiet life. I fear it'll seem very strange to you," said his Lordship, addressing himself to Miss Arminster.

"I think it'll be jolly," she replied promptly, looking up at him playfully to see whether he would bear chaffing, "and," she added, after due deliberation, "I think you're a dear, and your uniform is just sweet. I always did love a uniform. I used to be awfully gone, as a child, on a policeman at the corner of our block, but you're much more nicely dressed than he was."

His Lordship started to say something crushing in regard to the sanctity of ecclesiastical trappings, but another glance at the bewitching little figure that confronted him caused him to remark instead that he was glad she approved of him, and that he would try to take better care of her than even a guardian of the law.

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"Oh, I'm afraid I've said something shocking!" she exclaimed in a delightfully naïve manner, "and I did mean to be so good and decorous. I'm sure I'll need a lot of teaching."

"I shall be delighted to undertake the task," he replied gallantly. "Suppose we begin by going to evensong. Would you like to do so?"

"Rather," she returned; "but I'm afraid," looking at her travelling-costume, "that I'm hardly dressed for the part—I mean the occasion."

"Dear me!" said the Bishop, scrutinizing her keenly, "it seems to be a very pretty gown."

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "Then we'll go at once."

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"So we shall," he replied, "and you shall sit in the stalls."

"How jolly!" she exclaimed. "I almost always have to sit in the balcony."

"Really?" said his Lordship. "You don't say so. But from what Mr. Spotts says, I should judge that the architecture of American churches was novel." And they walked across the lawn to the

cathedral.

A few moments later, Miss Matilda, having dismissed her guests to their rooms, found herself alone with her nephew.

"Well," she said, turning on him sharply, "perhaps at last you'll condescend to tell me who these *friends* of yours are?"

"They're a party of ladies and gentlemen with whom I've been travelling in America," Cecil replied. "And as we'd agreed to join forces for the rest of the summer, I'd no option but to invite them here as my guests. The gentlemen I've already introduced to you—"

"Oh, the gentlemen!" snapped his aunt. "I've no concern about them. It's the women I—"

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"The ladies, Aunt Matilda."

"The ladies, then. Your father, in what he is pleased to call his wisdom, has seen fit to allow you to introduce these persons into his house. I'm sure I hope he won't regret it! But I must insist on knowing something about the people whom I'm entertaining."

"As I've told you already," he replied very quietly, "they're ladies whom I've met in America. I might also add that they've good manners and are uniformly courteous."

Miss Matilda tilted her nose till its tip pointed straight at the spire of the cathedral, and, without any reply, swept past him into the house.

Dinner, that night, in spite of his aunt's efforts to the contrary, was an unqualified success. The Bishop hailed with joy any interruption in the monotony of his daily life, and made himself most agreeable, while his guests seconded him to the best of their ability.

The meal being over, his Lordship proposed a rubber of whist, a relaxation of which he was very fond, but which, in the reduced state of his family, he was seldom able to enjoy. Mrs. Mackintosh and Smith, as the two best players of the party, expressed themselves as willing to take a hand, and Miss Matilda made up the fourth.

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"You'll excuse me," said his Lordship apologetically to Mrs. Mackintosh, "if we play only for threepenny points. Were I a curate I could play for sixpence, but in my position the stakes are necessarily limited."

"You don't ever mean to say," exclaimed the old lady, "that you're a gambling Bishop!"

"My brother," interrupted Miss Matilda, "is a pattern of upright living to his day and generation. But of course if you're incapable of understanding the difference between a sinful wager of money and the few pence necessary to keep up the interest of the game—"

"Gambling is gambling, to my mind," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "whether you play for dollars or doughnuts!"

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"The point seems well taken," remarked the Bishop meditatively. "It's certainly never struck me in that light before; but if you think—"

"I think," said the old lady decidedly, "that it's lucky for you that there are no whales in Blanford!"

Miss Matilda threw down her cards.

"If I'm to be called a gambler under my own brother's roof," she said, "I shall refuse to play. Besides I've a headache." And she rose majestically from the table.

"But, my dear," began the Bishop meekly, "if we cannot find a fourth hand—"

"If Miss Banborough doesn't feel up to playing," came the sweet tones of Violet's voice, "I'll be delighted to take her place." And a moment later she was ensconced at the table.

The Bishop's sister retired to a corner with the largest and most aggressive volume of sermons she could find, and sniffed loudly at intervals all the evening. And when at ten o'clock, in response to the summons of an impressive functionary clad in black and bearing a wand surmounted by a silver cross, the little party filed out to evening devotions in the chapel, Miss Matilda gathered her skirts around her as if she feared contagion.

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"I'm afraid of that old cat," Mrs. Mackintosh confided to Violet, when they had reached the haven of their apartments. "I'm sure she suspects us already; and if we're not careful, she'll find us out."

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CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE ENEMY ARRIVES.

"I say, boss," remarked the tramp, as he paused for a moment in the process of stuffing himself to repletion with cold game-pie, "this is a rum trip, and no mistake."

"What's that got to do with you?" retorted Marchmont sharply, appropriating the remaining fragments of the pasty to his own use.

The two men were seated in the shady angle of a ruined buttress, a portion of a stately abbey, which in pre-Norman days had flourished at a spot some half-dozen miles from the site of Blanford.

"Well," said the tramp, "if this ain't a wild-goose chase I dunno what you calls it. Here you've gone an' took me away from my happy home, an' brought me across the ragin' Atlantic, an' dumped me in a moth-eaten little village where there ain't nothin' fit to drink, all because I happened to chum with a Bishop."

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"You seem to forget," said Marchmont, "that it was you who came to me, offering to sell your friends and their secrets for a sufficient remuneration."

"So I did," said the tramp; "but it was revenge, that's what it was—revenge. I was deserted in a furrin land, with just my board-bill paid, and not a penny to bless myself with."

"Ah," said Marchmont. "That's the reason, I suppose, why you came from Montreal to New York in a parlour car."

The tramp sighed despondently, saying:

"Now whoever told you that, boss?"

"Nobody. I found the Pullman check in your coat-pocket when I was looking for my diamond ring, which you'd absent-mindedly placed there."

"Humph!" replied the other. "There ain't no foolin' you!"

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"I should be a pretty poor journalist if there were," said his employer. "Now give me the story again, and see if you can get it straight."

"Well, there ain't nothin' much to tell, 'cept I was carried off by them Spanish conspirators in mistake for a lady, which I in no-wise resembles, an' the bloke as was the head of the gang was allus called the Bishop, and a pretty rum Bishop he was."

"Never mind about his qualifications," interrupted Marchmont shortly; adding to himself, "That explains his son's presence in Montreal."

"Well, this Bishop," continued the tramp, "used to talk about his palace at Blanford; and when the party give me the go-by, I gathered from the porter as took their traps that they'd gone to England; and the elevator-boy, he heard the Bishop say to the little actress as they'd be as safe at the palace as they would anywhere. And then I come on to New York and blew it into you."

"Yes," said Marchmont, "and I've given you a first-class passage to England, paid your board and lodging, and kept you full for the best part of three weeks; and what do I get out of it?"

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"I admit as we haven't had much results as yet," said the tramp. "But now things is goin' to hum. The Bishop and his whole gang's coming over to these very ruins to-day."

"How did you find that out?" demanded the journalist.

"Footman up to the palace told me. I give him a little jamboree last night at the 'Three Jolly Sailor-boys.'"

"Yes, and had to be carried home dead-drunk. Nice one you are to keep a secret."

"Well, I was only a-doin' me duty," said the tramp in an aggrieved tone of voice, "and if they don't know you're after 'em, and you should happen to be inspectin' the ruins at the same time as they are, you could get chummy with 'em without half tryin'."

"I'll attend to that," said the newspaper man. "I've just had a cable from the *Daily Leader* telling me to hustle if I want to get that position, and I've got to do something, and do it quick. But it'll never do for you to be seen. Once they know we're together, the game's up. I can't have you larking round with the servants either. You'll spoil the whole show. You've got to go back to Dullhampton this afternoon."

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"What! that little one-horse fishing-town?"

"Yes, that's where you're wanted. It's the nearest port to Blanford, and it's where they'll try and get out of the country if they're hard pressed. You just stay there and keep your eyes open till you hear from me."

The tramp growled surlily, and reluctantly prepared to obey.

"Now, then," said Marchmont shortly, "get a move on. Yes, you can take the provender with you. It'll help to keep your mouth shut."

As the tramp slouched round the corner and out of sight, his master stretched himself comfortably on the ground, and supporting his head on one arm, with his straw hat tilted over his eyes to protect them from the sun, he proceeded to go peacefully to sleep.

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Scarcely had the journalist composed himself to slumber, when the ruins were invaded by the

party from the palace. It was now about a month since Cecil and his friends had arrived at Blanford, and though this expedition to the old abbey had been often discussed, one thing and another had intervened to prevent its being put into execution.

After her first burst of antagonism, Miss Matilda had settled down to a formal hospitality which was, if anything, more disconcerting. Tybalt Smith alone had achieved a favourable position in her eyes, and this only as the result of a very considerable amount of flattery and attention. At first his friends were at a loss to account for his attitude, but as time went on it appeared that the tragedian had not exerted himself for nothing. "The dear Professor" frequently had his breakfast in bed when he was too lazy to get up, and Miss Matilda considered the delicate state of his health required the daily stimulus of a pint of champagne. He also had the exclusive use of her victoria in the afternoon, and even if this did necessitate an occasional attendance at missionary meetings and penny readings, it was after all but a fair return for value received. On this occasion he had begged off going to the picnic, and was spending a luxurious day at the palace, waited on by the Bishop's sister.

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The party, having arrived at the abbey, promptly separated to explore the ruins, his Lordship gallantly offering to play the part of cicerone to the ladies. Miss Violet, however, for reasons of her own, preferred seclusion and a quiet chat with Spotts to any amount of architectural antiquities, so her host was enabled to devote his entire time to Mrs. Mackintosh.

"Does it strike you," remarked the Bishop, a few moments later, pausing in his wanderings to inspect critically a fragment of Roman brick—"does it strike you how absolutely peaceful this spot is?"

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"Well," returned Mrs. Mackintosh, "I don't know as it does. I should have said your palace was about as good a sample of all-round peacefulness as there is going."

"Ha," said his Lordship, "it hadn't occurred to me."

"That's just like you men. You never know when you're well off. Now with your palace and Jonah you ought to be content."

The Bishop sighed.

"Dear lady," he said, "I admit my faults. The palace I indeed possess temporarily, but Jonah—ah, what would Jonah be without you! If I have left my work once in the past month to ask your advice, I have left it a hundred times."

"You have," admitted Mrs. Mackintosh with decision.

"Then it is to you that Jonah owes his debt of gratitude, not to me. You have lightened my labour in more senses of the word than one."

"Well, I've had a very pleasant visit. Blanford's a little paradise."

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The Bishop sighed again, and remarked:

"Paradise I have always regarded as being peaceful."

"Yes," acquiesced his companion reflectively, "with all that Jonah went through, I don't remember as he had an unmarried sister."

There was silence for a moment, and then his Lordship abruptly changed the subject.

"What a charming, bright, fresh young life is Miss Arminster's! She dances through the world like—like—er—" And he paused for a simile.

"Like a grasshopper," suggested Mrs. Mackintosh, with marked disapproval in her tones. The Bishop had a trivial, not to say frivolous, strain in his nature which seemed to her hardly in accord with his exalted position.

"No, dear lady," objected his Lordship, "not a grasshopper. Decidedly not a grasshopper; say—like a ray of sunshine."

"Violet's a good girl," remarked his companion, "a very good girl, but in most things she is still a child, and the serious side of life doesn't appeal to her. I dare say she'd go to sleep if you read to her about Jonah."

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"She did," admitted the Bishop; "but then of course," he added, wishing to palliate the offence, "it was a very hot day. I suppose, however, you are right. Serious things do not interest her—and that is—I should say—we are serious."

"I am," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "and at your time of life you ought to be; and if we stand here any longer looking at that chunk of brick in the broiling sun, we'll both be as red as a couple of beets."

No amount of sentiment could be proof against a statement of this sort, and they moved on.

Violet and Spotts had meantime sat themselves down on a convenient tombstone to while away the interval till luncheon was served.

"There are lots of things I want to talk to you about, Alvy," began the little actress, "and I never

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get the chance."

"Well, fire away," he replied. "You've got it now."

"In the first place," she said, "I don't like the way things are going here."

"At the palace, you mean?"

"Yes. We're not aboveboard. We're shamming all the while. Besides, we're doing nothing in our profession."

"It's better than doing time in prison."

"It isn't straightforward, and I don't like it," she went on.

"Neither do I," he returned; "but there are other things I like less."

"Such as?"

"Well, people falling in love with you, for instance."

"Oh, Cecil. He received his *cong e* before we left America."

"I said *people*."

"You don't mean the Bishop?"

Spotts nodded.

"But he's such a dear funny old thing!" she cried.

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"What's that got to do with it?"

"Why, he might be my grandfather."

"He's as frisky as a two-year-old," remarked the actor.

"And finally," continued Violet, not noticing the interruption, "his old cat of a sister wouldn't let him."

"Worms have turned, and straws have broken camels' backs before now," persisted Spotts.

"Don't you call me names, sir! Worms and straws, indeed! What next, I should like to know!"

"If you don't take care, you'll be called his *Lordship's* 'leopard.'"

She burst out laughing.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "Why, I actually believe you're becoming jealous."

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I'd trust you, little girl, through thick and thin."

"I know you would, Alvy, and I'd rather marry you—well, ten times, before I'd marry a lord or a bishop once."

"I know it, old girl, I know it!" cried Spotts ecstatically, and slipped his arm round her waist.

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"Oh, do be careful," she protested. "Just think, if any one should see us! I'm sure I heard a footstep behind us."

They looked up, and saw Cecil above them, standing on the sill of an old ruined window.

He had not heard their words, but he had seen Spotts's embrace, and realised bitterly how little chance he stood against such a combination of Apollo and Roscius.

The month which had intervened since his return to Blanford had not been an altogether happy time for the Bishop's son. The pain of Miss Arminster's refusal still rankled within him, and that young lady's actions had not done much to soothe it. Had she comported herself with a resigned melancholy, he could have borne his own sufferings with fortitude. But, on the contrary, she had, he considered, flirted most outrageously with Mr. Spotts. Indeed Cecil was already strongly of the opinion that the actor was trying to succeed where he had failed—a course of action which he thought quite justifiable on his, Banborough's, part, but highly reprehensible on the part of any one else. Matters had now culminated. Fate had brought the three together at this inopportune moment, and as it was manifestly impossible not to say something, Cecil laid himself out to be agreeable, and Miss Arminster, who was naturally aware of the awkwardness of his position, did her best to promote conversation, while Spotts almost immediately cut the Gordian knot by excusing himself on the plea of looking after the lunch.

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"Well," she said, "what's the latest news from Spain?"

"It seems to me that the war must be almost over," he replied. "Now that Santiago's fallen, and Cervera's fleet's destroyed, Spain has no alternative but to yield."

"Ah," she murmured, "then we'll be free once more."

"Has your exile been so irksome to you?" he asked.

"Oh," she returned, "I didn't mean it that way, really. Believe me, I'm not ungrateful. Blanford's just sweet, and your father's an old dear." [Pg 187]

"Yes," he retorted, laughing. "I notice you're doing your best to usurp Mrs. Mackintosh's place in his affections."

"That's not from pique, it's from charity," she replied. "I've been trying to rescue her from Jonah."

"I'm afraid my governor must be an awful bore," he said.

"Oh, but he's so sweet and simple with it all," she objected. "I'm really growing to be awfully fond of him."

"I think he's growing to be awfully fond of *you*," said his son.

Miss Arminster laughed merrily.

"Don't you fancy me as a step-mamma?" she queried. "But, joking apart, I'm afraid even Blanford would pall on me after a while. It isn't my first visit here, you see. I was on a tour through these counties three years ago."

"That's how you came to know about my father, I suppose."

"Yes," she said. "I had him pointed out to me, and you look a good deal alike. Besides, the name's not common." [Pg 188]

"I'm glad you liked Blanford well enough to come back to it."

"Oh," she returned, looking up at him with a roguish smile, "this section of the country has other associations for me."

"I was waiting for that," he retorted. "In which of the neighbouring towns were you married?"

"The one nearest here," she replied. "I think we can just see the spire of the church over the trees. But how did you know?"

"I inferred it as a matter of course," he said banteringly, "but I'm only joking."

"But I'm not," she returned.

"Do you really mean that you were married over there?" he asked, pointing to the distant church.

"Yes," she replied. "The third of June, 1895."

"I say, you know," he said, "I think you might have married me once in a way, as I had asked you." [Pg 189]

"Mr. Banborough," she replied stiffly, drawing herself up, "you forget yourself."

"I beg your pardon," he returned humbly. "Only as American divorce laws are so lax, I thought—"

"The divorce laws of my country are a disgrace, and nothing would ever induce me to avail myself of them. Besides, marriage, to me, is a very serious and solemn matter, and I can't permit you to speak about it flippantly, even by way of a joke."

Cecil picked up a handful of pebbles and began throwing them meditatively at the fragment of an adjacent arch. The more he saw of Miss Arminster, the greater mystery she became. By her own admission, she had been married at least half a dozen times, which, were he to accept as real the high moral standard which she always assumed, must imply a frightful mortality among her husbands. But then she neither seemed flippant nor shallow, and her serious attitude towards the sacrament of marriage appeared wholly incompatible with a matrimonial experience which might have caused a Mormon to shudder. Anyway, she wasn't going to marry him, and he turned to the discussion of more fruitful subjects. [Pg 190]

"How's Spotts getting on with his studies in architecture?" he asked.

"I should think he'd learned a good deal," she replied. "Your father hasn't left a stone of his own cathedral unexplained, and I imagine he'll put him through his paces over this abbey."

"Poor Spotts! I'm afraid he's had a hard row to hoe," said Cecil; "but, anyway, it'll keep him out of mischief."

"You must be very careful what you say about him to me," she replied. "I won't hear one word against him, for we're very old friends."

"So I should infer," he retorted, "from what I've just seen. *I* never was allowed to put *my* arm—"

"How dare you!" she cried, rising, really angry this time. "I—" Then turning to the Bishop, who arrived very opportunely, she exclaimed: [Pg 191]

"Won't you rescue me, please? Your son's becoming awfully impertinent!"

"Then," said his Lordship gallantly, "my son must be taught better manners. If he cannot show himself worthy of such a charming companion, we'll punish him by leaving him entirely alone."

Certainly his father was coming on, thought Cecil. But if Miss Arminster tried to take advantage of his dotage to forge another link in her matrimonial chain, he, Banborough, would have a word

to say on the subject.

"I wish to tell you, my dear," began his Lordship as they walked away, leaving Cecil disconsolate, "of a very nice invitation I've received for the rest of the week. Lord Downton is to call for me in his yacht at Dullhampton to-morrow, and has asked me to join his party and to bring some lady with me to make the number even."

"Oh, how jolly that'll be—for Miss Matilda!" said the artful Violet.

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"Humph!—ye-es," replied the Bishop. "I hardly think my sister could leave the palace just at this time."

"Perhaps," suggested his guest, "yachting doesn't agree with her. Has she ever tried it before?"

"She has," replied the Bishop, with a certain asperity.

"Ah, poor thing!" said Miss Arminster. "It must have taken away from your pleasure to feel that she was suffering such great discomfort on your account."

"Lord Downton didn't specify my sister. He only said 'some lady'; and so I thought if you—"

"Oh, that's just sweet of you!" exclaimed his companion. "I'm sure I should adore yachting. It's something I've always wanted to do."

"Then we'll consider it settled," said the Bishop.

"But Miss Matilda?"

"Ah, yes," admitted his Lordship. "That's just the trouble. You see my dilemma."

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"Of course!" Violet responded promptly, understanding that he wished to be helped out. "If your sister knew you were going, she'd feel it her duty to accompany you, and the trip would be spoilt for you by her sufferings. So, out of your affection for her, you think it would be better if we were just quietly to slip off to-morrow and send her a wire from Dullhampton."

The Bishop was delighted. Miss Matilda never accepted him at his own valuation.

"So, just on your account," continued his companion demurely, "I won't say a word, though I hate any form of concealment."

"H'm—naturally," said the Bishop.

"But since it's for your dear sister's sake—"

"We'll take the eleven-fifty train to-morrow," replied his Lordship.

And here his remarks were cut short from the fact that in suddenly rounding a corner he had planted his foot on the recumbent form of Marchmont.

"Hullo!" said that gentleman, sitting up, and adding, as he rubbed his eyes to get them wider open, "permit me to inform you that this part of the ground is strictly preserved."

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"Who are you, sir?" demanded the Bishop.

"Come," said the stranger cheerfully, "we'll make a bargain. I'll tell you who you are, if you'll tell me who I am."

"I do not see how that is possible—" began his Lordship.

"Well, I'll begin," said Marchmont. "You're the Bishop of Blanford and I'm your son's greatest benefactor."

"Really, you surprise me. May I enquire how you've benefited him?"

"I made the fame of his book, 'The Purple Kangaroo.' I've been sending you my editorials on the subject for some weeks past."

"Are you the person who wrote those scandalous leaders which have been forwarded to me from America?" demanded the Bishop.

"I thought you'd remember them," said the journalist. "They're eye-openers, aren't they?"

His Lordship drew himself up and put on his most repressive manner, but Marchmont babbled on serenely.

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"The last time I saw Cecil he said to me: 'Whenever you come to England, Marchmont, you just drop round to the palace, and we'll make things hum.' So, having a chance for a little vacation, I jumped on board a steamer, crossed to Southampton, and biked up-country, doing these ruins on the way. I meant to have presented myself at the palace this afternoon in due form and a swallow-tailed coat, but I'm just as much pleased to see you as if I'd been regularly introduced."

"You're one of the most consummate liars I ever knew," remarked Cecil, who, hearing voices, had strolled over to see what it was all about.

"Put it more mildly, my dear fellow," replied the American. "Call me a journalist, and spare your father's feelings."

"Well, now you're here, what do you intend to do?" demanded Banborough.

"Do?" said Marchmont. "Why, I'm going to put up for a week at your 'Pink Pig,' or your 'Azure Griffin,' or whatever kind of nondescript-coloured animal your local hostelry boasts, and study your charming cathedral. But, in the first place, I think we'd better have some lunch. I'm as hungry as a bear." [Pg 196]

"I fear we've scarcely provided for an extra guest," returned Cecil frigidly. The journalist was the very last person he wanted to see at Blanford, and he did not take any pains to disguise the fact.

Marchmont, however, was not to be snubbed, and remarking cheerfully that there was always enough for one more, calmly proceeded in the direction of the hampers. Once there, he constituted himself chef and butler forthwith, and moreover proved so efficient in both capacities that, irritated as his friend was at his self-assurance, he could not but express his appreciation.

Marchmont, having started the rest of the people on their lunch and made all feel at their ease, turned on his journalistic tap for the benefit of the Bishop, and plied the old gentleman with such a judicious mixture of flattery and amusing anecdote that, by the time the repast was over, his Lordship was solemnly assuring his son, much to that young gentleman's disgust, that he was indeed fortunate in possessing such a delightful friend, and that he might invite Mr. Marchmont to the palace if he liked. [Pg 197]

"Quite so," said Cecil. "I suppose you remember his article in the *Daily Leader*, in which he alluded to you as a 'consecrated fossil'?"

"H'm!" said the Bishop. "Really, the accommodation at the inn is very good, and perhaps, with so many guests, it would be asking too much of your aunt."

"What does all this mean?" asked Spotts of Banborough when a convenient opportunity offered.

The Bishop's son shrugged his shoulders, replying:

"It means mischief." [Pg 198]

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PEACE IS PROPOSED AND WAR DECLARED.

Marchmont stood on the lawn before the palace, on the morning after his arrival, critically inspecting that structure; his feet stretched wide apart, his hands in his pockets, and his hat on the back of his head.

Cecil, emerging from breakfast, sighted his enemy and made haste to join him.

"Jolly old rookery you've got," remarked the reporter.

"Yes," said Banborough. "It was a monastery originally. They turned it into a bishop's palace about the reign of Henry VIII."

"I know that style," said the American. "Nice rambling ark, two stories high, and no two rooms on the same level. Architect built right out into the country till he got tired, and then turned round and came back. Obligated to have a valet to show you to your room whether you're sober or not." [Pg 199]

"I didn't know," said Cecil drily, "that you possessed an extensive acquaintance in ecclesiastical circles in this country."

"Oh, yes," said Marchmont, "I served as valet for six months to a bishop while I was gathering materials for my articles on 'English Sees Seen from the Inside.'"

"Was it a financial success?" queried Banborough.

"No," admitted the reporter regretfully, "it sold the paper splendidly, but was stopped at the second article at the request of the American ambassador."

"Did you favour us with a visit?"

"I hadn't that honour."

"If you had done so you would probably have slept in the rooms we give to our American guests in the new part of the house."

"How old is that?" queried the journalist.

"About eight hundred years," replied Cecil, "and the walls are four feet thick." [Pg 200]

"I know," said the reporter, "It's appalling. That sort of thing always upsets me. It seems so out of keeping with the *Daily Leader*."

"Look here, Marchmont, why have you come to Blanford?" demanded Banborough, abruptly changing the conversation.

"To have the joy of your society," returned the journalist.

"If that were really the case I'd be delighted to see you," said the Englishman. "But you're on the track of these unfortunate people who are my guests; and if you make things disagreeable for them I shan't have the slightest compunction in forbidding you the house."

The American, apparently ignoring the other's frankness, remarked:

"So you admit they're conspirators?"

"I admit nothing of the kind. They're perfectly innocent of the charge you bring against them, and you've been making an awful ass of yourself, if you only knew it."

"Ah, thank you. But if this is the case why didn't you mention the fact to me in Montreal?"

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"I had my reasons."

"And why are all these people received as honoured guests in your father's palace?"

"That, if you'll permit me to say so, Marchmont, is a matter that doesn't concern you."

"Everything concerns me. Not that I expect you to see that point of view. But to put it another way. Considering all I've done to increase the sale of your book, won't you do me a good turn and tell me what you know about this affair?"

"I wish the confounded book had never sold a copy!" burst out Banborough. "And I'll not say one word to the detriment of my friends!"

"Then it *is* to be war?" queried the journalist, rolling a cigarette.

"Not so far as I'm concerned," replied his host. "Why don't you let bygones be bygones? A truce between the United States and Spain may be declared any day, and then—"

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"Then my great scoop will be lost for ever. What would the public care about conspirators if there were no war?"

"Exactly what I say," said Cecil. "So let's drop the whole matter."

"Not much!" cried the journalist. "It's my last chance. And if you won't help me—why, I must help myself."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Turn 'em out of Blanford."

"Impossible!"

"But your father?"

"How dare you mention my father's name in this connection? I won't have him dragged into publicity to sell your dirty rag of a newspaper!" Cecil exploded, thoroughly beside himself at the thought of such a dreadful possibility.

The journalist nodded his head gravely. Banborough's fierce defence of the Bishop he attributed to far other grounds than those on which it was really based. It justified him to the tramp's suspicions that his Lordship was actually connected with the plot.

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"Well," he said, with a fair pretence of backing down, "there's no need of getting so hot about it. Of course I don't want to make myself disagreeable."

"Neither do I," replied his host. "Only we may as well understand each other. You're quite welcome to come to the palace as long as you remember to be a gentleman before you are a journalist. But if you forget it, I'll be forced to treat you as you deserve," and turning on his heel, he left Marchmont chewing the ends of his sandy moustache with a grim avidity that boded ill for the peace of the Bishop and his household.

The American told himself that he must work carefully. Banborough would watch him and probably put the others on their guard. And moreover, he would not hesitate to dismiss him from the palace, which, apart from the unpleasantness of the operation, would be well-nigh fatal to the success of the scheme the journalist was maturing. Decidedly the highest caution was essential, but he must work quickly, for there was no time to be lost. Marchmont therefore proceeded to pump the first member of the company he came across. This happened to be Spotts, who was in rather a bad humour, the result of a morning spent with the Bishop in the cobwebby heights of a neighbouring church-tower.

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"You're the very person I wanted to see," cried the reporter.

"I'm afraid I've hardly time to be interviewed just now," replied the actor shortly.

"Oh, this isn't professional. I'm off duty sometimes. I'm only human."

"Oh, are you? I supposed newspaper men were neither the one nor the other."

"Well, I wanted to talk to you for your own good."

"Is it as bad as all that?"

"Of course I know who you really are," pursued the journalist, ignoring the interruption. "And I may say confidentially that you and Miss Arminster are not the people of this party I'm after."

"Ah, that's very thoughtful of you."

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"So, if I could help you two to slip off quietly—"

"Why include Miss Arminster?" queried Spotts with well-affected surprise.

"Why? My dear fellow, you don't suppose I'm quite blind. Any one who follows that lady about with his eyes as you do is naturally— Well—you understand—"

"I'm afraid your professional acumen is at fault this time," said the actor, and added: "I hope I may never come any nearer being married than I am now."

"Oh, I say," returned Marchmont; "don't you aspire to be her—sixteenth, is it?"

"You're alluding to Miss Arminster's husbands?" asked Spotts drily.

"Oh, I'd a little bet up with a friend," said Marchmont, "that she'd been married at least a baker's dozen times. Ought I to hedge?"

"I think you're well inside the number," replied the actor.

"Gad! she must be pretty well acquainted with the divorce courts!" exclaimed the reporter.

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"I'm quite sure she's never been divorced in her life," returned Spotts. "So long. I'm after a drink." And he left him, thus terminating the conversation.

"Ah," said the journalist to himself, "I bet you're the next in line, just the same."

Baffled in his first attempt, Marchmont sought other means of information, for there is always a weak spot in every defence, and a man of far less keen perception than the reporter would have had little difficulty in finding the most favourable point of attack. So it is not surprising that after a little cogitation he went in search of Miss Matilda, whom he had met the day before when he had returned with the party from the abbey. He found that lady on the lawn knitting socks for the heathen, and deserted for the nonce by the faithful Smith.

"Dear Miss Banborough," began the journalist, sitting down beside her, "what a reproach it is to idle men like myself to see such industry!"

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, to notice my humble labours," replied the old lady, expanding at once under the first word of flattery. "My brother tells me you're connected with a great newspaper. How ennobling that must be! It gives you such a wide scope for doing good."

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Marchmont, who had hardly adopted journalism for this purpose, and was conscious of having done his fair share of mischief in the world, made a desperate effort to look the part assigned to him, and murmuring something about the inspiration, to toilers like himself, of such self-sacrificing lives as hers, abruptly turned the conversation by alluding to the pleasure which she must have felt at her nephew's return.

"Of course we're very glad to have him back," acceded Miss Matilda. "But then we see little or nothing of him."

"Naturally," said the journalist, "his days must be given up to his friends. How you must be looking forward to the time when you can have him quite to yourself!"

The gleam that came into the old lady's eye at this remark told him that he had not been mistaken in fancying her hostile to the strangers, and he hastened to continue such a fruitful theme, saying:

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"I suppose that, as they've been here a month now, you'll be losing them soon."

"I can't say," she snapped. "They seem to be staying for an indefinite period."

"Really?" he replied. "I shouldn't have fancied that your nephew would have found them very congenial. Indeed, if you'll pardon my frankness, I was rather surprised to meet them here."

Miss Matilda at once gave him her undivided attention.

"You knew them in America?" she asked.

"Of course I knew about them. I was hardly acquainted personally."

It was his tone rather than his words that lent an unfavourable colour to the remark, but the implication was not lost on the Bishop's sister. Here at last was a man who could give her the information she was most anxious to obtain.

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"I should have supposed," she ventured, "that you'd have known such very intimate friends of Cecil's as these appear to be."

"Oh, no," he returned. "New York's a big place. I dare say you know much more about them than I do."

"I know nothing!" she burst out. "Strange as it may appear to you, my nephew has never told me

one word concerning his guests, though I'm expected to receive them under my—his father's roof and introduce them to my friends."

"I see," replied Marchmont cautiously. "Cecil should have trusted to your excellent discrimination and judgment, unless—" and here he paused.

The position required consideration. It was easy enough to tell her about these people. Merely to say that they were an itinerant company of actors and actresses would be sufficient to ensure them a speedy *congé* from Blanford. But was it wise to do this? Did he want them to go? A hasty action is often like a boomerang. It returns on the toes of the person who thoughtlessly launches it in flight. No, on the whole they had better remain, he told himself. The palace would form an excellent background for the sensational exposure he hoped to make. If he could only get the Bishop into a corner, he would be quite satisfied.

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"Well, what?" she demanded sharply, impatient at his unfinished sentence.

"Unless," he continued, hedging carefully—"unless your nephew felt that it was quite sufficient to have explained things to his father. Doubtless the Bishop knows all about his son's friends."

"The Bishop knows a great deal too much for a man in his position," snapped his sister.

"Quite so," thought the journalist, "and doesn't confide it to you." Aloud he remarked:

"Of course there's nothing particular to be said against them, except that they're hardly in Cecil's set."

"I didn't need you to tell me that. But what about the ladies?"

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"Ah, yes, the ladies. Well, really, you've put me in an awkward position, Miss Banborough. One can't be uncomplimentary to the fair sex, you know."

"Humph! Well, Josephus sees more of both of them than is good for him. But of course Mrs. Mackintosh has neither the youth nor the good looks to cause me any anxiety."

"Mrs. Mackintosh is eminently respectable," said Marchmont, who always spoke the truth when it did not conflict with business.

"But Miss Arminster?"

The journalist did not answer.

"Well," she cried, "why don't you speak?"

"Madam," he replied, "you place me in a most embarrassing situation. My duty to you and the natural gallantry of my nature draw me in different directions."

"I insist."

"I put myself in your hands. In saying what I do I'm laying myself open to serious misconstruction."

"You may rely upon my silence."

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"Any indiscretion on your part would be most unfortunate."

"I shall not forget the confidence you've reposed in me."

"I shall hold you to that," he said. "If I tell you what I have in mind, will you promise not to use the information without my permission?"

"That I cannot say."

"Then I say nothing."

"But you've already implied—"

"But implications, my dear Miss Banborough, are not evidence."

"You leave me no other course but to accede to your request," she said.

"Ah, then you promise?"

"I promise."

"The word of a woman in your position and of your high moral standard I know is sacred."

She nodded.

"Well, then," he continued, "please answer me this question. Where was your brother the first week in May?"

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"In Scotland."

"Why did he go?"

"For absolute rest. He was worried and run down."

"You heard from him frequently?"

"No, not once during the whole time. Sir Joseph Westmoreland, the great London nerve specialist, who advised the change, even prohibited correspondence."

"You're sure he was in Scotland?"

"Really, Mr. Marchmont, why do you ask?"

"Because I saw the Bishop of Blanford in the United States in the first week of May on his way to Montreal, Canada."

"Impossible!"

"I'm certain of it."

"I cannot credit what you tell me!"

"What I tell you is quite true. You say he was absent for a month. Might he not have gone to the States and returned in that time?"

His sister nodded. Then, as a sudden thought occurred to her, she flushed red with anger, exclaiming:

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"And this girl, this Miss Arminster! Was she in Montreal also?"

"She was," replied Marchmont. "I saw her."

"The hussy!" cried Miss Matilda, rising. "She shan't remain in my house another hour!"

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "You forget your promise!"

"But after what you've said!"

"I haven't said anything. Miss Arminster's being in Montreal might have been merely a coincidence."

"But do you know something about her?"

"I've investigated her career," he replied, "and have found nothing objectionable in it, beyond the fact that she's rather fond of getting married."

"Getting married! But surely she calls herself *Miss Arminster*?"

"Ah, yes; but that's very common on the—I mean, not unusual in such cases."

"She has been married, then, more than once?"

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"I know of a dozen different occasions on which she has had the service performed."

"Infamous!"

"Oh, no. There's no evidence of her ever having been through the divorce court. Indeed, she may never have been married to more than one man at the same time."

"But how to account—"

"For the mortality in husbands? Well, fortunately, we're not required to do that."

"I will not have my dear brother stricken down in his prime!" gasped Miss Matilda.

"Oh, I don't suppose she's necessarily fatal. Still, as mistress of Blanford—"

The Bishop's sister arose in her wrath. For the first time in her existence she wanted to swear, but contented herself by remarking:

"That young woman leaves the palace to-day!"

"You forget your promise to me," he said.

"But is it possible, in the face of what you've told me, that you can hold me to it?"

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"Quite possible. In fact I mean to do so, and as soon as your righteous indignation cools down a bit you'll realise that we've nothing whatsoever to go on. What I've said could only be substantiated by evidence requiring some time to obtain. If you accused her now, she'd merely deny my statement, and her word's as good as mine, and probably better, in his Lordship's estimation."

"But is there no proof near at hand?"

"Yes. She was married several years ago at a little church close by the ruined abbey where I first met your party, and the fact is recorded in the register."

"Then surely—"

"There's no crime in being married once," he objected.

"But what *can* we do?" she asked.

"Keep quiet for a little while longer. Miss Arminster's certain to make some slip, and then—"

"It seems very difficult to wait."

"Believe me," he replied, "it's the only way, and I shall rely on your promise."

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Saying which, he left her, partly because he had obtained all the information he wished, and partly because he was certain that he espied the well-known figure of the tramp hovering behind the bushes on the opposite side of the lawn.

A few moments later he had his hand on that individual's collar, and was demanding sternly what he meant by coming to Blanford against his orders.

"'Cause I've somethin' of importance to tell yer," retorted that worthy.

"Well, out with it, quick!" said the journalist. "It's got to be pretty important to excuse your disobedience."

"It is. The boss is going to bolt."

"Who? The Bishop?"

"That's it! Him and the lady."

"What lady?"

"The young 'un, I guess."

"What's all this stuff about?" demanded Marchmont.

"It ain't stuff, as you'll soon see," replied the tramp in an aggrieved tone. "There was a yacht come into Dullhampton last night, a nasty-lookin' boat and a quick steamer. The second mate and me, we got to know each other up to the inn—he's a furriner, he is—a Don, more'n likely. But he let on, havin' had some drink, as how he'd been sent there with the yacht to wait for the Bishop o' Blanford and a lady as was comin' down next day, and the Bishop was to give the sailin' orders."

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"Humph! What more?"

"This mornin' I seed 'em lookin' over a lot of flags on the deck of the yacht, and one of 'em was Spanish."

"So you came all the way up here to tell me this cock-and-bull story!"

"Not till I'd squared the crew."

"Squared the crew?"

"I let on to 'em as how they'd been shipped under false orders to carry two Spanish spies out of the country, an' how we was on to the fact, and if they'd stay by us they'd not be held responsible; and I promised 'em ten shillin's apiece and give 'em all the drink they wanted, and they're ours to a man."

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"And that's where you've wasted good money and good liquor. I tell you what you say is impossible. If the Bishop had had any idea of a move like that, I'd have got wind of it. Besides, his old cat of a sister would never let him leave Blanford again without her."

"Hist!" said the tramp, pointing across the lawn. "Look there, what did I say? My eyesight ain't what it was, from breakin' stones up to Sing Sing, and I can't see no faces at this distance, but there's somethin' sneakin' along there, in bishop's togs."

Marchmont followed the direction he indicated, and saw two figures stealing round the corner of the palace, carrying hand-bags and showing every sign of watchfulness and suspicion. Having ascertained that the lawn was clear, they slipped rapidly across it, and, putting themselves in the protecting shade of a clump of bushes, turned into the high-road and disappeared. It had needed no second glance to identify them as his Lordship and Miss Arminster.

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"By Jove!" gasped the journalist. "It is true, then! This will be a scoop of scoops! Come, we've got to run for it. We must take the same train, and they mustn't see us."

Some one else had witnessed the departure, in spite of all the precautions of the fugitives, and that person was Miss Matilda, who, from the vantage of an upper window, caught a glimpse of them just as they disappeared through the gate. Unwilling at first to believe her senses, she rushed to her brother's room and then to Miss Arminster's. Alas! in each apartment the traces of hasty packing and missing hand-luggage gave damning evidence of the fact. She rushed downstairs, bursting with her dreadful intelligence. In the hall she met Cecil, delightedly waving a telegram in his hand.

"Hurrah! Aunt Matilda!" he shouted. "Such news! 'The Purple Kangaroo' has reached its twentieth edition, and a truce is declared between the United States and Spain! Where are the others? I must tell them that the war is over."

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"Bother your war!" exclaimed his aunt. "Do you know that your father and that shameless minx, Miss Arminster, have just eloped?"

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CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE BISHOP IS ABDUCTED.

All the way from Blanford to Dullhampton the Bishop was in the best of spirits, much on the principle of a naughty boy who, having played truant, means to enjoy his holiday to the full, well knowing that he will be caned when it is over. Indeed his Lordship became positively skittish, and Miss Arminster was obliged to squelch him a little, as that young lady, for excellent reasons of her own, had no more intention of becoming the mistress of Blanford than she had of wedding the author of "The Purple Kangaroo." On the other hand, she realised that it was one of the old gentleman's very rare treats, and she wanted him to have as good a time as possible; besides which, she had always longed to take a cruise on a steam-yacht, and now her ambition was about to be gratified.

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The shock of disappointment was therefore all the greater when, on their arrival at Dullhampton, they were met by the captain, who informed them that Lord Downton had had a bad fall the day before and seriously sprained his ankle, so that the party had been given up. He had sent the yacht on, however, with the request that the Bishop would consider it at his disposal for the remainder of the week.

"Now that's exceedingly awkward," said his Lordship. "I fear we can hardly go yachting without a chaperon."

"Most certainly not," agreed Miss Arminster. "But let's take a little sail this afternoon, and return to Blanford in time for dinner."

"That's very well thought of," said the Bishop, "and to-morrow we can bring down some more of our party. It seems a pity we shouldn't use the yacht, now we're here. Does that arrangement meet with your approval, captain?"

"Well, your Lordship," replied the captain, "to be honest with you, I hadn't expected as how you'd be able to get away to-day, so I'd arranged to see my sister, who lives here, this afternoon, and the first mate's gone up to town to order some stores. But if you are only to be out for a few hours, as you say, my second mate's quite capable of taking the boat for you. I wouldn't like to trust him on a long cruise, for he's only joined a few weeks, and I know nothing about his character. He is a first-class navigator, however, and for an afternoon in the Solent he'll do you very well."

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"I'm sure we would not want to interfere with your plans, captain," said his Lordship, "so if Miss Arminster agrees—"

"Oh my, yes," acquiesced Violet. "I don't care who takes the yacht out, so long as we go."

"Right you are," said the captain. "Steam's up, and I've ordered lunch on board, as I thought you'd want that anyway. I'll tell Funk, the second mate, to run out into the Solent, and then you can give your own orders. What time will you be back?"

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"Oh, not later than six," replied the Bishop, as they stepped on board Lord Downton's beautiful craft, the "Homing Pigeon."

She was a large boat and thoroughly seaworthy. Indeed her owner had made a voyage in her to the Mediterranean, but she was built for speed also, and decidedly rakish in cut.

They were at once introduced to the second mate, and Miss Arminster thought she had seldom seen a more unprepossessing individual. He was surly and shifty-eyed, and she confided to the Bishop, when they were alone, that she was glad they were not going far from land under that man's charge, for he looked like a pirate.

After glancing round the deck, which seemed charmingly arranged, they at once descended to the cabin for lunch, for their little journey had made them hungry. Here the captain left them with a few courteous words of excuse. A moment later, as he was leaving the ship, he met two strangers coming on board, laden with hand-baggage. They were, though unknown to him, the journalist and the tramp. On asking them sharply what their business was, Marchmont replied very glibly that he was his Lordship's valet, and that he had hired this man to bring down the luggage from the station.

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"I don't think your master'll need his traps, as he's only going out for the afternoon," said the captain. "But you'd better take them down to the cabin, and see the porter gets off before they start. I don't allow strangers aboard."

The valet touched his hat respectfully, and went up the gangway, followed by the obsequious porter. A moment later they reached the deck, and no sooner had the captain disappeared round a corner than both men approached the second mate, with whom they had a hurried and earnest conversation, followed by an interchange of something which that officer transferred to his trousers-pocket and jingled appreciatively.

The ropes were now cast off, and they got under way, while Marchmont stole very quietly to the door of the hatchway which led down to the saloon where the Bishop and the actress were

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unsuspectingly lunching, and softly turned the key.

"Mayn't I cut you a slice of this cold ham, my dear?" asked the Bishop in his most fatherly tones.

"Not while the pigeon-pie lasts," said his fair companion. "But you may give me a glass of champagne, if you will. I see some going to waste in an ice-cooler over there in the corner."

"I was hoping the steward would come," ventured his Lordship.

"Well, I hope he won't. Being tête-à-tête is much more fun, don't you think? Give the bottle to me, and I'll show you how to open it and not spill a drop. In some respects your education's been neglected."

"I'm afraid it has," admitted the Bishop, assisting her with his pen-knife.

His Lordship felt recklessly jovial. To lunch alone with a young lady who opened champagne with a dexterity that bespoke considerable practice must be very wicked, he felt certain, and he was shocked to realise that he didn't care if it was. His years of repression were beginning to find their outlet in a natural reaction.

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"Here, have a glass of champagne, and don't think about your shortcomings," she said.

"That's very nice," he replied, just tasting it.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "No heel-taps. I'm no end thirsty."

"So am I," replied his Lordship, draining his glass contentedly, and watching her fill it up again.

"What are you so pensive about?" she demanded. "There's another bottle."

He had been thinking that his sister always confined him to two glasses, but he didn't say so, and under her skilful lead he was soon describing to her a Cowes regatta he had once seen, in which she professed to be amazingly interested.

"I tell you what it is," she remarked a little later on. "If I had a gorgeous palace like yours I'd have no end of a good time."

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"Ah," said the Bishop, who was helping her to unfasten the second bottle of champagne, "I never thought of it in that light."

"No," returned his fair companion, "I suppose not. But you're losing lots of fun in life, and it does seem a shame, when you would so enjoy it."

"It does," said the Bishop, sampling the fresh bottle. "But then, you see, there's my sister, Miss Matilda—"

"Rats!"

"Excuse me, I didn't catch your meaning."

"Never mind my meaning. We're talking about your sister. She's a most estimable woman, my dear Bish— Oh, pshaw! I can't always call you by your title."

"Call me Josephus," he said.

"No, I couldn't call you that, either. It's too dreadful. I'll call you Joe."

The Bishop beamed with joy.

"And I," he faltered, "may I call you Violet?"

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"No," she said, "I don't think it's proper in a man of your position."

"But if you call me—Joe—"

"Well!" she cried, laughing, "we'll make a compromise. Suppose you call me 'the Leopard'?"

"To be sure," he said. "Mrs. Mackintosh spoke of you as that—er—quadruped. But what does it mean?"

"You want to know a great deal too much for a man of your age. It's an animal that is more than once mentioned in Scripture, and that ought to be sufficient for your purposes. So we'll have it understood that his Lordship's Leopard is quite at his Lordship's service, if his Lordship doesn't mind."

"Mind!" he cried ecstatically, eyeing the other side of the table. But Miss Violet intended to have the board between them.

"Take another glass of champagne, and keep quiet," she said sternly. "We're talking about your estimable but impossible sister. My dear Joe, you'll never have any sport till you've got rid of her."

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"But how shall I get rid of her?" he asked despondently. Even champagne was not proof against the depression induced by such an appalling thought.

"Oh, send her to a course of mud-baths or a water-cure!"

"I might try it—if—if you'd help me—if you'd take her place at the palace. I mean—"

"Josephus!" she called, in such an exact imitation of his sister's tone that it made him sit right up. "Josephus! don't say another word! I know what you mean—and you're an old dear—and I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself. You're aged enough to be my father, and if your son had had his way you would have been my father-in-law. I want to have a good time, and I want you to have a good time; but that isn't the proper manner in which to set about it. No, you send the old lady packing, for the good of her health, and Mrs. Mackintosh and I'll help you and Cecil entertain, and we'll have a dance, and a marquee, and lots of punch. I dare say you've never been to a dance in your life," she rattled on, not giving him a chance to blunder out excuses.

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"I'm not such an old fogey as you think me," he began. "But I want to say—er—Miss—Leopard—"

"Oh, no, you don't," she interrupted. "You want to forget what you've said, and so do I. We must talk about something else. What were you saying about a dance?"

"No, no, not a dance," he replied, resigning himself to his fate. "But once," lowering his voice, "not long ago either, when I was in town, I—I'm sure you won't believe it— I went to a theatre." This last triumphantly.

"Oh, you sad dog!" she cried. "You didn't!"

He nodded his head affirmatively.

"And what was the piece?"

"The Sign of the Cross."

"What, that gruesome show, where every one's slaughtered or chewed up by lions! You ought to have gone to the Empire."

"It wasn't far from Leicester Square," he said deprecatingly.

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"Not near enough to be very wicked," she retorted. "But, say, I'll tell you something if you'll promise never, never to reveal it."

"The word of a bishop—" he began.

"Oh, nonsense! You're not a bishop at present, you're just Joe. Well, here it is: I'm an actress!"

"You—are—an—actress!"

"Fact! I'm quite harmless. If you keep six feet from me there's not the slightest danger of contamination."

Then, seeing his look of astonished bewilderment, she burst into a peal of ringing laughter, crying:

"Why, to look at you, one would think I'd told you that I was a Gorgon!"

"No, no," he said, stammering. "I—I'm delighted. I always really wanted to meet an actress—but —er—I hardly know what to say—"

"Don't say anything. Just be your dear unsophisticated self, or you'll be a bore. Cecil didn't dare tell you who I was, for fear you'd be shocked. Come on, let's go up on deck. It's close down here."

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"It is," admitted his Lordship, whose temperature had risen with his consumption of champagne, and added:

"We should be well out by this time, for we seem to have been going at great speed."

"Isn't it glorious!" she cried. "I wonder what they're doing at Blanford. I guess your telegram was an eye-opener."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Bishop, fishing a form out of his pocket. "I forgot to send it."

"What, do you mean to say they don't know what's become of us?"

"I never said a word."

"My hat!" she cried. "Won't you get a wiggling to-night?"

Then, seeing his evident discomfiture, she added:

"Never mind, I'll take it with you; and if she turns nasty we'll put a flea in her ear about those mud-baths. Come, let's have our fun, anyway." And she put her hand on the cabin door.

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"Why, it's stuck!" she exclaimed. "I can't open it."

The Bishop grasped the handle.

"It isn't stuck!" he cried, shaking it. "It's locked!"

While events had been progressing in the cabin, others of no less importance were taking place

on deck. Once they were well off the land, Funk lost no time in calling a meeting of the crew of the yacht, who formed a circle around him.

"Now, my hearties," he said, introducing Marchmont, "this gentleman's got a word to say to you which it's worth your while to hear." And he put him in the centre of the ring.

"Mates," began the journalist, fitting his speech to the audience he was addressing, "I'm a plain man of few words, and I've come to you about a plain matter. Mr. Funk will tell you I'm speaking the truth; and you know this gentleman," indicating the tramp.

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The crowd growled gutturally. They appreciated the tramp's generous offers of liquor, but not his society.

"Well," continued Marchmont, ignoring the unfavourable tone, "I suppose you'd all like to see the Yankees lick the Dons."

"Ay, ay, you're right there," muttered a burly tar.

"Good for you! We're all of the same family, and blood's thicker than water. Of course you want the boys in blue to win; and that being the case, I rely on you to help me, like true British tars, the nation's bulwarks—!"

"Hear, hear!" growled the crowd appreciatively.

"Now do you know whom you've aboard to-day?" demanded the American.

"The Bishop o' Blanford, and a laidy," came the tones of a voice whose owner evidently hailed from London.

"No, you haven't," cried the journalist excitedly. "No, you haven't! You've got two low-down Spanish spies!"

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"What d'ye say, mate?" demanded the first speaker among the crew.

"I'm telling you the truth," vociferated Marchmont, lying boldly; for he feared that the Bishop's conspiracies would go for nothing if they suspected he was really a churchman.

"I'm telling you the truth," he repeated. "And these two gentlemen," referring to the mate and the tramp, "will back me up. That man's no more the Bishop of Blanford than you are! And the *lady*—well, she's on the stage when she isn't in the pay of the Spanish Government. I've tracked them from the States to Canada, where I saw them both a month ago, and then to England. I don't say how they got hold of this yacht, but I ask you, where's the captain and the first mate?"

A growl of suspicion rewarded his efforts.

"They took pretty good care to get out of the way, and leave Mr. Funk and you to bear the brunt of any breach of neutrality that these conspirators might let you in for."

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The sailors began to whisper to one another, and were evidently uneasy.

"Then look at the captain's parting words!" cried the journalist. "'Go out into the Solent,' says he, 'and the *Bishop* will give you your sailing orders,' Sailing orders, indeed! What would a parson know about sailing a vessel of this sort?"

One of the men nudged another at this, and he of the gruff voice gave it as his opinion that "there was summat in it."

"I'll tell you what the sailing orders will be," shouted Marchmont. "They'll take you round the Needles, and alongside of a Spanish cruiser. And when you get ashore, you'll all be clapped into prison for helping the Dons."

"Let's take 'em back now," came a chorus of voices.

"And let 'em go scot-free?" demanded Marchmont.

"Well, what would *you* do?" asked the spokesman.

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"I?" said the journalist. "I'd hand 'em over to the first American ship we sight, and send 'em to New York. That takes the burden off *your* shoulders. My man has promised you ten shillings apiece. Put 'em on board a Yankee ship, and I'll make it a pound." And he brought up a handful of gold from his pocket, and jingled it in their faces.

It has been said that money talks, and it undoubtedly did so in this case. Marchmont's specious arguments sounded plausible enough, and the mate, who was a thoroughly bad lot and had plenty of the journalist's money in his pocket, backed him up in every particular. So the crew, after a little discussion, accepted the proposition to a man, and the fact that the Bishop chose this unfortunate time to make an attack on the cabin door probably helped to decide them.

"You see," cried the journalist, as it rattled on its hinges, "they're trying to break out now, and are probably armed to the teeth."

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"We're with you, mates. The Yankees shall have 'em!" shouted the crowd.

"Good!" he replied. "I'll see if I can induce them to surrender quietly." And going to the cabin door, he unlocked it and entered, closing it behind him.

"Who has dared to lock us in in this unwarrantable manner?" spluttered the Bishop, as the door opened. Then, seeing who it was, he fell back a step, exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Marchmont, how did you come on board?"

"Never mind about that," said the journalist shortly. "I'm here, and I locked you in; and when I tell you that I'm thoroughly on to the whole show, you'll understand that this high-and-mighty business doesn't go down. Got any champagne left? I'm as dry as a bone."

The Bishop was rapidly turning purple with suppressed indignation, but Miss Arminster scornfully indicated the location of the wine-cooler.

"Ah, thanks," said the intruder, tossing off a glass. "That's better." And he threw himself comfortably down on a divan, saying, as he did so: [Pg 241]

"If you two have any weapons, you might as well put them on the table. Resistance is quite useless. I've plenty of men awaiting my signal on deck."

Violet, who in the light of this last remark suddenly understood the position, burst into peals of laughter.

"You'll find it's no laughing matter," cried the journalist angrily.

"I insist upon your instantly explaining your outrageous conduct," said the Bishop.

"I can do that in a very few words," replied Marchmont. "As an American representative, and authorised agent of the *Daily Leader*, the people's bulwark of defence, I arrest you both as Spanish spies."

"He must be mad!" ejaculated his Lordship.

"Oh, no, he isn't. He actually believes it!" cried Violet between her paroxysms of merriment. But her companion would not be convinced. [Pg 242]

"My dear man," he said blandly, "you must be suffering under some grievous delusion. I am, as you should know, having been my guest, the Bishop of Blandford, and it is quite impossible that either I or this lady should have any connection with a political crime. I must insist that you release us at once, and go away quietly, or I shall be forced to use harsher measures."

"You do it very well, very well indeed," commented the journalist. "But you can't fool me, and so you'd better give up trying."

"I say," remarked Miss Arminster to Marchmont, "you're making an awful fool of yourself."

The representative of the *Daily Leader* shrugged his shoulders.

"Won't you consent to let us go, without threshing the whole thing out?" she asked.

"What do you take me for?"

"Well, as you please," she said resignedly. "Put your questions; we'll answer them." [Pg 243]

"Is it best to humour him?" enquired his Lordship in a low voice.

"It's the only way," she replied. "Give him string enough, and see the cat's-cradle he'll weave out of it."

"Now," said the journalist cheerfully to the Bishop, "perhaps you'll deny that you spent a month or six weeks in the United States this spring?"

"A month," acquiesced his Lordship.

"Just so. And during that time you were supposed to be in Scotland taking a rest-cure?"

"I admit that such is the case. But how you obtained your information—"

"I got it from your sister—about the rest-cure, I mean."

"Did you tell her—er—that I was—er—in the United States?"

"Yes," replied the journalist.

His Lordship heaved a deep sigh. The future, he thought, held worse things for him than arrest and deportation. [Pg 244]

"How did you know that I was in the United States and Canada?" he demanded.

"I saw you."

"Where?"

"At a little station on the borders of the two countries. You spent the night wrapped up in a blanket, and slept under the bar."

"You never—!" broke in Miss Arminster.

The Bishop nodded mournfully. So far the facts were against him, and his interlocutor's face shone with a gleam of triumph.

"But in that case—" exclaimed Violet.

"Excuse me, I'll tell the story," said Marchmont, and continued the narration.

"You were roused about five in the morning by a man breaking into the room."

"So I was," admitted the Bishop. "How did you know?"

"I was asleep in the room overhead, and gave the alarm."

"That's perfectly correct," acquiesced his Lordship. "I remember the tones of your voice. It's most astounding." [Pg 245]

"And the man who broke into the bar," continued Violet, "was your son."

It was now Marchmont's turn to be astonished.

"What!" he cried, while the Bishop ejaculated:

"Impossible!"

"But it was," she insisted. "He went to get the coffee for me."

"Were you in the station, too?" demanded his Lordship.

"No, I was out in a potato-patch."

"You a member of that party of political criminals who jumped off the train!" cried the Bishop. "I heard all about it the next morning, but I can't believe—"

"It's quite true," she assured him.

"But it's too remarkable," he went on. "I'd gone to America on purpose to find my son, of whom I'd heard nothing for a year. And you say he was there, and—er—touched me?"

"Why, didn't you see him in Montreal?" asked Marchmont. [Pg 246]

"I sailed next day for England. I was on my way to the steamer when the accident occurred which detained me overnight."

"Why then did you conceal the purpose of your trip?" demanded his tormentor.

"My sister was much opposed to my seeking my son," said his Lordship, colouring furiously. "And—I—in short, I had reasons."

The journalist laughed.

"The story's clever," he said. "But I can tell a more interesting tale." And he proceeded to relate the adventures of Cecil in the person of "the Bishop," to which his Lordship listened with open-mouthed astonishment.

"There!" concluded his captor triumphantly. "Have you anything to say to that?"

"I have," chimed in Miss Arminster, and she gave the true version of the affair from the time Banborough had first engaged them at the Grand Central Station.

"It's a very plausible story," said Marchmont, when she had finished, "and does credit to your invention. But fortunately I'm in a condition to completely disprove it." [Pg 247]

"Really?" she asked. "How so?"

"I can produce a witness of the whole transaction."

"Who?"

"Friend Othniel."

"What! here, on board the yacht?"

"Yes," said Marchmont, "on board this yacht. And he can prove that what I say is true."

"What? About the Bishop?" she cried, her voice quivering with suppressed merriment.

"Certainly," replied the journalist. "After his release from the Black Maria he tells substantially your story, but gives the Bishop the part you have carefully assigned to his innocent son."

At this she once more broke into peals of laughter, but at last, recovering her speech, managed to gasp out:

"Bring him here, and see what he says."

"I will," said Marchmont, hurriedly leaving the cabin, for her marvellous self-possession was beginning to arouse unpleasant suspicions even in his mind. [Pg 248]

"But what does it all mean?" queried the Bishop helplessly, after the journalist's departure. "How

dare he say such things about me! I drive a prison-van, indeed!"

"I'll tell you," she replied, striving to control her voice. "It's the greatest practical joke that ever was. We called your son 'the Bishop,' just as a nickname, you see, and of course the tramp heard us, and, after we dropped him in Montreal, must have blown the whole thing to Marchmont out of spite, and, not knowing any better, he thought your son really *was* the Bishop."

Here his Lordship became speechless, as the truth dawned upon him; and at that moment Marchmont entered the cabin, with Friend Othniel in tow.

"There!" he said, pointing to the ecclesiastic. "Is that the Bishop of Blanford?"

"Naw," replied the tramp. "He's old enough to be his father, he is. The Bishop I means is a young 'un." [Pg 249]

"Like this!" cried Violet, opening the locket which Cecil had given her in Montreal, and handing it to the tramp.

"That's him to a T," said Friend Othniel. "I'd know him among a thousand."

For a moment Marchmont said nothing as he encountered the full force of the cruel disillusion, and then with painstaking precision he turned and kicked the tramp up the entire flight of cabin stairs.

"Now," remarked the Bishop, "perhaps you'll allow us to go free."

"No!" cried the journalist, slamming the door. "I've wasted heaps of cash and no end of time over this wild-goose-chase, but the *Daily Leader* shall have its scoop yet! If you aren't conspirators, I'll make you so, in spite of yourselves! You *shall* be Spanish spies!" [Pg 250]

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE BISHOP EATS JAM TART, AND MISS MATILDA HUMBLE-PIE.

"Now," remarked the Bishop to Miss Arminster, as Marchmont quitted the cabin after this last astounding remark, "Now I'm certain he's mad."

"Oh, no," replied the lady, "it's merely journalistic enterprise. I don't blame him for being disappointed. It must be hard to find that we're not conspirators, after all."

"But why should he wish to make us so?"

"You dear stupid old Joe!" she exclaimed. "You haven't the remotest inkling of what American journalism means. It's sensation first, last, and altogether. Think of a bishop, and an English bishop at that, posing as an agent of the Spanish secret service, and eloping with an actress on somebody else's yacht. Why, I can shut my eyes and see the headlines. They're almost certain to print them in red ink. There's fame for you!" [Pg 251]

"But why should he wish to print it if it's not the truth?"

"Truth! My dear Bishop, who said anything about truth? We were speaking of news, and—journalistic enterprise."

At this moment the door again burst open, and Marchmont flung into the cabin.

"There!" he said, with a tone of triumph, "we've sighted an American steamer down channel, and have hoisted the Spanish flag. We're pursuing her, and very presently we shall be captured, and you'll be surrendered."

"I suppose," began the Bishop, "that, to a man so devoid of moral consciousness as you appear to be, no arguments of mine—"

"Don't waste your breath," broke in Miss Arminster. "They wouldn't."

"Why, I'm sorry to cause you any inconvenience," said the journalist amiably, "but you see, my paper's simply panting for sensation, and when they hear about this little racket they'll sell extras till they can't see straight." [Pg 252]

"And what, may I ask, will happen when the truth comes out?" demanded his Lordship severely.

"Oh, the war'll probably be over by the time you reach New York, and you'll cease to be interesting," replied Marchmont. "Besides, we'll have had our scoop, and most likely, when the *Daily Leader* finds there's no case against you they'll give you a return ticket. The management's generally pretty liberal."

"Well, I must say," spluttered the Bishop, "that of all the brazen—unconscionable—!"

"Why did you raise the Spanish flag?" interrupted Miss Arminster.

"That was my idea," said the journalist, "and I'm rather proud of it. You see, we could hardly reverse the Union Jack as a sign of distress, and then go full speed ahead, but I don't think an American ship would resist taking a Spanish prize; and as soon as they get within firing range we'll run up a flag of truce. By the way," he continued, becoming quite courteous, now that he felt he had them in his power, "why do you remain in this stuffy cabin? I shall be very glad to have you up on deck, provided you'll give me your parole."

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"What, not to escape?" asked Violet. "Did you think we were going to jump overboard and swim ashore?"

"No. I mean that you should give your parole not to be anything but Spaniards."

"I am afraid we couldn't manage that," she replied. "The Bishop doesn't look nearly ferocious enough."

"I absolutely refuse to become a party to this deception!" said his Lordship.

"Oh, I don't ask you to do that," returned Marchmont, "only to promise that you'll not try and enlist the sympathies of the crew in your behalf."

"I shall not promise anything," said the Bishop, "nor shall I allow this lady to do so. I'm a man of peace, but if ever I get hold of you on dry land I'll horsewhip you, if it costs me my see; and if you don't leave this cabin at once I'll treat you as you treated your friend. You are a thorough blackguard, and not fit to associate with gentlemen!"

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The journalist started to say something, but, remembering that his accuser was muscular, thought better of it, shrugged his shoulders, and went out silently, locking the door behind him.

"There!" said his Lordship, "I can breathe more freely now."

Miss Arminster made no reply, for the excellent reason that her head was out of a port-hole, and she could not hear clearly what was said. Presently she pulled it in again, crying, as she did so:

"Oh, do look! This is great sport! The American ship is running away from us!"

Such was indeed the case. The vessel they were overhauling was a small tramp steamer, which had evidently found courage, through the general incapacity of the Spanish navy and the fancied security of neutral waters, to flaunt the Stars and Stripes. It was therefore most disconcerting to find herself suddenly pursued in the English Channel by a craft which had every appearance of being a Spanish gunboat. No sooner had she caught a glimpse of the red and yellow flag of her enemy than she crowded on to her yards every stitch of canvass she possessed, in the hope of obtaining some advantage from the light breeze that was blowing, while the black clouds of smoke which belched from her single funnel showed that her engines were being driven to their utmost capacity. She having a long lead and the combined assistance of wind and steam, the distance between the pursuer and the pursued decreased slowly, and it soon became evident that it was to be a stern chase, which is proverbially a long chase. The yacht, therefore, turned about in search of some fresh enemy to whom she might surrender, and in this fortune favored her, for down the Channel came a great liner, whose name, albeit she flew temporarily the flag of another nation, proclaimed her to be an American ship, with an American captain and crew.

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Those on board the "Homing Pigeon" now adopted different tactics, and an inverted British ensign replaced the banner of the Dons.

As the yacht stood directly in the path of the oncoming ocean greyhound, and flew signals of distress which she could not disregard, the great ship was forced to heave to. Marchmont hastened to convey the news to his prisoners in the cabin, saying that he considered them very fortunate, as they had every prospect of a speedy and pleasant voyage, and cautioning them at the same time, as he led the way up the cabin stairs, that resistance was futile, and that any remarks of theirs to the crew would only be so much waste of breath. To all of which neither deigned to answer a word, realising that in their present precarious position silence was not only the most dignified but also the safest course.

As they reached the deck the great liner was almost abreast of them, and gradually came to a standstill with clouds of pent-up steam pouring from her safety-valves.

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"What do you want?" bawled her chief officer through a megaphone, his voice sounding very large and clear from the great height above them.

"We've two prisoners of war, Spanish spies, and we wish to hand them over!" shouted the mate in return.

"This isn't an American ship," came the reply.

"Yes, it is," howled Marchmont; "we know better! You belong to the 'Pink Star' line."

The chief officer conferred with the captain.

"It's Mason and Slidell the other way round," he said. "I wouldn't touch 'em with a ten-foot pole. Besides—" and here he seized the megaphone from his subordinate and yelled through it:

"You infernal idiots! don't you know the war with Spain is over? We've declared a truce!"

"I don't believe it," cried Marchmont, shaking his fist at the great steamship in a paroxysm of

disappointed rage. "It's only an excuse to shirk your duty! We've brought them out to you, and you've got to take them! I'll report you to the government! I'll—!" [Pg 258]

The sharp ring of the engine-room bell from the liner's bridge was the only reply vouchsafed him, and a moment later the big ship forged ahead, her captain very red in the face and swearing like a trooper: for the most precious thing on board a racer of that class is time, and the "Homing Pigeon" had been wasting it.

The Bishop, noting the sheepish faces of the mate and his two fellow conspirators, and the lowering glances of the crew, turned to Miss Arminster, saying:

"We'd better return to the cabin, my dear. I think there's going to be trouble."

The little actress followed his Lordship's gaze, and descended without a word of protest. She thought so, too.

They had hardly entered the saloon, when there came a respectful knock at the door, and an elderly seaman entered, ducking his head. [Pg 259]

"Well, my good man," said his Lordship, "what can I do for you?"

"Meanin' no disrespect, sir, be you really the Bishop of Blanford?"

"Certainly I am," that gentleman replied. "You see my dress, and," as a happy thought struck him, "here's one of my cards to prove my identity." And he handed the sailor a bit of pasteboard with his title engraved thereon.

"And the lady?" asked the seaman.

"The lady is no more connected with this absurd charge than I am," pursued the Bishop. "You've been grievously misled by your mate and these two strangers. But if you'll take us safe to the nearest port, I'll speak a word in your favour to your master, Lord Downton, who's an intimate friend of mine. Can you read?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Then here's a letter from his Lordship, which I fortunately have by me, requesting me to join his yacht. Read it yourself, and show it to your fellows as a proof of who I am." And he handed him the missive. [Pg 260]

The sailor took it, ducked again, and retired silently, and there was presently a great shuffling of feet on the deck above.

"What do you think they're doing?" asked Violet.

"I trust they're coming to their senses—and if—" But his remarks were interrupted by a most terrific row overhead, shouts, blows, and curses.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Bishop. "What can be the matter?"

"They're squaring accounts with Marchmont, Friend Othniel, and the mate, I guess," she replied, "and I hope they'll half kill them."

"Fie, fie! my dear Leopard—most unchristian. I must certainly go and—"

"No, you mustn't do anything of the sort! Stay right where you are. We're in hot enough water already." And suiting the action to the word, she pushed him back on to the divan. [Pg 261]

"Well, really—!" remarked the Bishop, and collapsed amiably.

Presently the sounds of commotion ceased, and gave way to laughter, but laughter with a certain grim note in it that boded ill for those laughed at. After a little, there came another knock at the cabin door, and this time quite a deputation entered the saloon, the sailor who had first visited them being the spokesman.

"Having disposed of those gents as you suggested—" he began.

"No, no!" the Bishop hastened to disclaim, "I suggested nothing."

"Well," said the seaman, "we've fixed 'em, anyway. And now we're heading for the nearest port, which the same's Weymouth, and we hopes you'll overlook what's gone before, and come on deck and take command of this yacht."

"I will certainly come on deck," replied the Bishop. "But as to assuming command of the ship, I hardly feel qualified. Is there not some one among you—?" [Pg 262]

"I'm bo'sn, please your honour," volunteered the speaker.

"Ah," said the Bishop blandly, "then I appoint you." And as the men fell back, he escorted Miss Arminster upstairs.

As they appeared on deck, a striking scene met their eyes. Three wretched figures were triced up to the mainmast. They had only such remnants of clothes remaining on their persons as decency demanded, and they had all evidently made a recent acquaintance with the ship's tar-barrel and slush-bucket.

As his Lordship and Miss Arminster appeared, the crew approached, expecting a speech.

"I hardly know what to say," began the Bishop to Violet.

"Let me speak to them, will you?" she asked, her eyes sparkling. "I understand human nature pretty well. I have to, in my profession."

His Lordship nodded assent, and a moment later she had sprung on to the cabin hatch, a most entrancing little figure, and instantly commanded the attention and admiration of her audience. [Pg 263]

"Mates!" she cried, in her clear ringing voice, "mates, I want a word with you."

"Speak up, and welcome!" called some one in the crowd, while the boatswain, nudging a comrade in the ribs, remarked under his breath:

"My eye, but she's a stunner!"

Silence having been obtained, she continued:

"I've only this to say. We've all been made fools of. Those gentlemen tied up to the mast made fools of you, and you've certainly made fools of them."

A loud laugh greeted this sally.

"And," she resumed, "if it ever gets out that his Lordship the Bishop of Blanford and myself were carried off as Spanish spies, we'll never hear the last of it. Now let's all keep silence for the sake of the others. Put us ashore at Weymouth, and we'll say to Lord Downton that it was our wish to be landed there. He won't know about the occurrences of this day, unless some of you tell him. You might leave the journalist and the tramp at Weymouth, too. I guess they'll have had enough of the sea to last them for some time. And oh, by the way, I suppose Mr. Marchmont intended to pay you for this. Perhaps you'll see that the division is properly carried out." [Pg 264]

"Ay, ay!" came from twenty throats, followed by a rousing cheer.

And so it happened that they reached *terra firma* about six in the afternoon. But Weymouth, while it is geographically not far distant from Blanford, is miles away by the railroad and its connections, and they did not reach the palace till nearly midnight.

Everything was dark and still, and as they stood shivering in the porch, the Bishop remarked, producing his latch-key:

"Do you know I—I'm really afraid to open the door."

She gave his hand a reassuring squeeze, and they entered softly.

"Is there anything I can get for the Leopard, before she retires?" he asked apologetically, as they crossed the stone-paved floor of the palace by the aid of a single bedroom candle, which only served to accentuate the surrounding darkness. [Pg 265]

"No, thank you, I'm all right," she faltered, putting her foot on the first step of the stairs. And then, without the slightest warning, she burst into tears.

His Lordship, completely bewildered at this unexpected turn of affairs, patted her on the head, saying: "Dear, dear!" much as he would have done to obstreperous babies suspicious of baptism. But the fair Violet wept on.

"What is it?" said the Bishop. "What have I done?"

"You haven't done anything," she replied between her sobs, "but I—I'm so dreadfully hungry."

"Dear me!" exclaimed his Lordship, "I forgot all about dinner."

It was quite true that, in his anxiety to catch trains and make a series of bewildering connections, the question of food had entirely escaped his memory, and, now he came to think of it, he was ravenously hungry himself. [Pg 266]

"I'm so sorry," he said helplessly. "We must see what we can find."

It was years since he had dared to investigate his own pantries; but under the spur of Miss Arminster's necessities he achieved prodigies of valour, even breaking into that holy of holies, his sister's jam-closet. The little actress aided and abetted him, creating havoc among jars of sardines, olives, and caviare. And then, while they were in the midst of their midnight orgy, a figure appeared before them—a figure clad in an indescribable dressing-gown and carrying a bedroom candle.

"Josephus," said the apparition, "is that you?"

"Yes, my dear," replied the Bishop, with his mouth full of jam tart, "it is."

"I wonder you've the face to enter the house!" said his sister. [Pg 267]

"His own house! That's good," commented Miss Arminster from the midst of sardines.

"I admit that the circumstances are unusual," remarked the Bishop, cutting himself another large slice of the pastry, "but the train service is most irregular, and, as you can see, it was necessary

to bring the Leopard home to-night, and so—"

"Josephus!" broke in his sister, "there are no leopards in this country, and I *can* see that to the other sins you have undoubtedly committed you have added the vice of—"

But she got no further, for the Bishop, casting a glance at each of the two women, decided that now or never was salvation at hand, and said brusquely:

"Matilda, go to bed at once!"

It was the first time he had ever spoken to her in tones of authority, and his sister, not believing her ears, returned to the charge.

"And as for that shameless minx—" she continued; but his Lordship again interrupted, remarking severely:

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"Matilda, go to bed instantly!"

But the spinster was not yet defeated.

"Josephus!" she began, in her most approved style.

"Go to bed!" repeated the Bishop sharply.

For one moment she wavered. Then, realising that under the present conditions resistance was worse than useless, she turned slowly upon her heel, and marched upstairs with the air of a martyr going to the stake.

"You were right," said his Lordship moodily, as he disposed of the last piece of pie-crust.

"Right about what?" asked Violet.

"Mud-baths," returned the Bishop.

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CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MISS ARMINSTER PROPOSES TO MARRY AGAIN.

Cecil and Miss Matilda breakfasted alone the next morning. This was not by intention, but by fate. Violet and the Bishop, for obvious reasons, kept their respective rooms. Mrs. Mackintosh had felt it her duty to breakfast with, and comfort, her friend in distress, likewise to receive an early account of the doings of the day before; while Smith and Spotts, hearing that the fugitives had returned, took an early breakfast and adjourned to the neighboring golf-links. Cecil, however, who slept well, came down at the usual hour, quite unconscious of what was impending, and calmly walked into the trap.

After the ancient butler had passed the tea and toast, and then withdrawn, as was his wont, leaving them to carve out their own salvation, Miss Matilda lost no time in opening up the contest. She had been at swords' points with her nephew ever since the evening before, as a result of his stoutly maintaining his father's innocence, and the manner in which she reported her midnight meeting would have made even Marchmont envious.

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"And now of course he'll have to marry her," she wound up her recital.

"Good heavens! I hope not!" ejaculated Cecil.

"I'm glad," remarked his aunt stiffly, "that we've at least one point of agreement."

"Oh, we are quite agreed on that," he returned. "It would never do at all; in fact it's quite impossible."

"You know, then?" she demanded.

"Know what?" he asked cautiously.

"That she's been married dozens of times already."

"I don't think I can subscribe to more than half a dozen. But Miss Arminster certainly does seem to have a fondness for that sort of thing."

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"And in the face of such scandalous proceedings do you consider her a fit person to marry your poor misguided father?"

"I've told you I don't approve," he said, and added: "How did you come to know about Miss Arminster's marriages?"

"Mr. Marchmont told me."

"Confound him!"

"Cecil! Mr. Marchmont's a gentleman."

"He's a mischief-maker of the first water."

"Do not let us waste time in discussing his character. The important question is, what are we to do about your father's marriage?"

"Stop it."

"But how?" she asked. "Shall I speak?"

"No, no; leave it to me," he said. "I'll undertake to settle the matter. If you saw the Bishop, you'd only irritate him."

"He told me to go to bed, last night, after that woman had insulted me."

"Insulted you? I thought you told me she'd nothing to say for herself."

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"Her presence was an insult, and one of us leaves this house to-day," replied his aunt, and swept out of the room.

Cecil gulped down his tea, and, ringing the bell, sent an urgent message to Miss Arminster, requesting a meeting in his aunt's boudoir, which, considering the purpose of the interview, he was sure Miss Matilda would not object to put at her disposal.

Violet received him in about twenty minutes, apologising for her charming tea-gown, on the ground of being somewhat seedy.

"Our supper last night was rather extraordinary, you know," she said.

"I've only heard one version," he replied.

"Miss Matilda's?" she asked, laughing.

He nodded.

"I fancy it was lurid enough," she went on; "but your good father's out of leading-strings this time, and no mistake."

"Tell me all about it," he said. "I'm most anxious to know."

"Of course you are," she returned. "So here goes."

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Banborough enjoyed the recital immensely, and laughed immoderately at certain passages.

"So the governor knows all about our adventures?" he said, when she had finished. "Did he seem much upset?"

"Only about not recognising you when you blacked his eye under the bar."

"What a good old chap he is! Just think of his coming all that way to hunt me up! I wish he could have some fun out of life."

"We must try and help him to do so," she said.

"Yes," he replied, suddenly recollecting the object of his mission. "It's just that that I've come about. You see he's awfully conscientious, and when he's thought things over a bit, helped by my aunt's amiable suggestions, he'll come to the conclusion that he ought to marry you, you know—and so—well, he'll try to do it," he ended lamely, hoping she would see the point without further elucidation on his part.

She was quick to take him up.

"And you don't think that's just the best way for him to have a good time? Sour grapes—eh, my son?"

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"No, no; only he's certain to propose to you."

"Supposing he has done so?"

"Well—did you accept him?"

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I don't quite see how you could—under the circumstances."

"Oh, he'd only had two bottles of champagne," she said, purposely misunderstanding him from pure joy of seeing him flounder.

"I didn't mean that," he went on. "But, anyway, his conscience will reassert itself, and he'll probably propose again this morning—ponderously."

"And you're afraid I might accept?"

"I'm sure you'd make a most charming step-mamma," he replied, "only—"

"Only what?"

"Only the—the others might object, mightn't they?"

"The others?"

"All the men you've married," he blurted out, "if you will have it."

"I see," she said meditatively. "And you don't want to run the 'dear Bishop' in for another scandal."

"Of course, if you choose to put it that way—"

"It's the way you'd put it if you only had the pluck," she retorted.

"Are you awfully angry with me?" he asked, looking at her.

"Not a bit," she replied. "From your point of view it's quite justifiable, I suppose, and I'm only considering the best way out of the dilemma."

"Are there several?"

"There's only one that I care to choose."

"And that is?"

"I shall marry again."

"Good heavens! not—!"

"Not your father, no; some one else."

"But surely—!"

"You see," she continued calmly, ignoring his interruption, "if I marry some one at once your father can't have any feeling of—shall we say responsibility? And it'll not be necessary for me to go into what Miss Matilda would call 'my shameful past.'" [Pg 276]

"But I really couldn't allow—"

"Oh, I'm not going to marry you either, so you needn't be alarmed. Can't you make some suggestions to help me out?"

"I am afraid you must excuse me," he said, fast becoming scandalised at her matter-of-fact way of approaching the subject.

"Well, of course," she went on thoughtfully, "there are all your father's chaplains, but they're young, and prone to take things seriously. No, I don't think they'd do. And there's the butler. No, he wouldn't answer, either."

"Perhaps Miss Matilda would lend you Professor Smith."

"No," she said, "I don't think I'd have the heart to deprive her of him. On the whole, I think I'll marry Mr. Spotts. He's nice—and handy." [Pg 277]

"But mightn't he have something to say?" began Banborough.

"Probably," admitted Violet; "but he generally does what he's told, and as he isn't married to any one else, I dare say he'll prove amenable when he understands the position. I'll try and see him this morning, and," as a brilliant idea struck her, "your father shall perform the ceremony. I never was married by a Bishop before. Won't it be jolly!"

"You surely can't seriously intend—" began Cecil.

"Yes, I do. Now don't be stupid, but run along and let me finish my toilet." And she ran out of the room.

Banborough walked away in a maze. He had thought to straighten matters out, and he had only got them into a far worse tangle. That Miss Arminster had no conscientious scruples about adding another husband to her quota was bad enough, but that his innocent, unsuspecting father should be allowed to disgrace his cloth by solemnising such a marriage was really more than he could stand. In his righteous wrath he determined that the Bishop should know the whole truth, soothing his conscience by the thought that if he did not tell him, Miss Matilda would. [Pg 278]

In the hall of the palace, however, he ran across Spotts, laden with the implements of golf, and all unconscious of his impending fate.

"Look here, old man," said Cecil, "I want to have five minutes' chat with you."

"I am quite at your service," replied his friend. "In fact I was just coming to look you up myself. Now that the war's over, I must really be thinking of going away, as I've imposed long enough already on your hospitality."

"Oh, it isn't about that I want to see you," said Banborough. "It's about your getting married."

"My getting married?" queried Spotts.

"Yes. It seems there's a lady who has matrimonial designs on you. I thought it was only the part of a friend to warn you in due season." [Pg 279]

"If it's your aunt," returned the actor, "I'm very much obliged. I think I could manage to get packed up and leave by the afternoon train."

"No, no; it isn't so bad as that," said his host. "Or, rather, it's worse. Miss Arminster has you under consideration."

"As a husband?"

"Yes. I think she means to marry you to-morrow or next day, and have my father perform the ceremony."

"Oh, I see. And you've some feeling about it."

"Well, yes," admitted Cecil, "I'm afraid I have."

"I suppose you'd like to take my place?"

"No, it isn't that either. You don't seem to see the point. Miss Arminster wants to marry *you*."

"Well, isn't that a question between Miss Arminster and myself?"

"Naturally. But then she's married pretty frequently, hasn't she? Of course, if all her husbands are dead—"

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"Oh, no," said Spotts. "I don't think she's ever lost a husband."

"But you surely can't contemplate—" began Cecil.

"Well, you see," contended the actor, "this is the first time she's ever asked me to marry her, and one can't be so ungallant as to refuse a lady."

"And you'll really add yourself to her list?"

Spotts shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I don't want to appear rude, but this interference in my prospective matrimonial affairs seems to me ill-timed. Miss Arminster hasn't as yet proposed to me, and if she does, I'll probably consent to oblige her. Anyway, it's doing you a favour, as I suppose your father would wish to marry her if I didn't." And turning on his heel, he walked away.

As he ascended the stairs, he met Violet coming down. They were standing on the broad landing, and for the moment were quite alone and out of earshot.

"I say!" burst out the actor. "Do you know I have just been warned against you by your friend Banborough. A joke's a joke, but this is going too far."

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"I know, Alvy," she said, "I know, and I'm awfully sorry. But it's almost over."

"I hope it is," he replied. "I have held an equivocal position for months, and it isn't pleasant. Why, I've practically seen nothing of you."

"It hasn't been pleasant for me either, old man. But, to speak frankly, you know as well as I do that it's been largely a sentimental interest which has caused Cecil to get us all out of this scrape. However, if he doesn't tell his father to-day—and I tried hard enough to force him to do so this morning—I shall."

"Good! Then his Lordship's Leopard will be free," said Spotts. And pressing her hand, he proceeded on his way upstairs.

In the face of his two interviews, Cecil felt he had no option but to refer the whole matter to the Bishop, whom he found in his study. He received a somewhat grim reception from the old gentleman, to whom a sleepless night had afforded ample opportunity for reflecting on the vagaries of his son, to which he, not altogether unjustly, attributed his adventures of the preceding day.

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After formal salutations had been exchanged, the younger man, feeling that a disagreeable business was the better over, lost no time in coming to the point.

"I don't know that there's anything to be said about the past, father," he began.

"I should think there was a great deal to be said," returned his Lordship brusquely. "But this is perhaps not the best time to say it. I've been told a very astonishing story by Miss Arminster."

"About the Black Maria and—the Spanish plot?"

"About your wretched novel, sir!"

"Ah, yes. Well, I corroborate it all, word for word. Miss Arminster told me about it this morning."

"You've seen her, then?"

"Yes. We had a chat concerning a number of things. But, as you suggest, we might reserve the discussion of our joint American experiences till another occasion, so I won't mention them beyond apologising to you for having blacked your eye under the bar; though of course I could hardly have supposed that your ecclesiastical duties would have placed you in just that position."

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"Say, rather, the search for an unregenerate son," suggested the Bishop, with a twinkle in his eye which showed him to be in better humour.

"Well, anyway, you gave as good as you got," said Cecil. "My ribs were sore for a week afterwards."

"Ah," replied his Lordship. "I thought I must have landed you one. I haven't quite forgotten the athletics of my college days."

"Then we're quits," returned Cecil. "But it was more than good of you to come out there and look for me. A father who could do all that deserves a somewhat better son than I've been in the past; and in the future—"

"Don't say it, Cecil. I know it." And the Bishop gripped his hand in a way that caused the mental and moral atmosphere to clear instantly. [Pg 284]

"And now," said his son, "I want to talk about Miss Arminster."

"It's the subject nearest my heart," replied his father.

"I asked her to marry me at Montreal," Cecil remarked simply.

"So I inferred from what she said on the yacht," said his Lordship.

"And you proposed to her yesterday."

"Did she tell you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well, the fact is she doesn't want to marry either of us."

The Bishop nodded his head despondently.

"But," continued the younger man, "she contemplates marrying some one else."

"Ah," said his Lordship, "I'm heartily glad she proposes to *marry*—after yesterday."

"Quite so, and she means to ask you to perform the ceremony." [Pg 285]

"Isn't that rather—"

"Rubbing it in?" suggested Cecil. "So it seemed to me."

"Who is the—er—prospective bride-groom?"

"Spotts."

"He seems a good fellow."

"Yes, but—will you forgive me if I speak frankly? There can't be any feeling of jealousy between us; we've both been worsted."

"What do you wish to say?"

"That I'm afraid this marriage must not be permitted. You see, Miss Arminster isn't quite what she seems."

"If you're going to say anything against that young lady—!" began his Lordship angrily.

"You forget," said his son, "I wanted to marry her."

His father remembered; and remembering, said:

"Proceed."

"Well, I found out, for myself I mean, that Miss Arminster had been married a number of times." [Pg 286]

"A number of times!"

"Half a dozen at least. Perhaps more."

"Impossible!"

"She admitted as much to me."

"But surely—!"

"As far as I know, none of her husbands has died."

"In America," began the Bishop, "the divorce laws are lax, and perhaps—"

"Oh, no, I'm sure she hasn't been divorced. I don't think she'd approve of it."

"But then—it means—"

"Yes, that's just the point. And so another marriage with this Mr. Spotts—"

"Must be stopped at all costs!" cried his Lordship, growing very red in the face with agitation.

"I thought you'd feel so," said his son. "And that's why I ventured—"

At this moment Miss Matilda entered the room.

"What are you talking about, Josephus?" she demanded, assuming a domination of which she felt by no means sure. "Did I hear you mention that hussy's name?" [Pg 287]

"I was speaking," said the Bishop, "of *Miss Arminster*. Cecil tells me she's to marry Mr. Spotts."

"That's impossible," snapped Miss Matilda.

"What do you mean?" asked her brother.

"I mean what I say. While you were shamelessly gallivanting down the Channel, I went over to the little church near the ruined abbey which you visited the day you met Mr. Marchmont, and there I found a record of the marriage, in 1895, of this *person* who calls herself *Miss Arminster*, and I say she can't marry Mr. Spotts."

"Why not?"

"Because she's married to him already!"

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CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH MISS ARMINSTER VERIFIES THE PROVERB.

The Bishop was pacing his garden. He was far from happy. It is true he had not been worsted in his encounter with his sister. There had been a drawn battle, and he had retired with dignity, conceding nothing but that he would ask Miss Arminster to come to his study at noon and explain her position. He could not believe the charges against the charming Violet, but nevertheless he felt decidedly uncomfortable: for even if she cleared herself, she was still married, and the palace lacked a mistress.

It was easy to say that Miss Matilda should be deposed, but who should take her place? Not another man's wife, certainly. For the first time in all these years, his Lordship realised how lonely he had been. He should have remarried long before, and indeed even so unworldly a person as he knew that more than one young lady in Blanford would have viewed with complacency the prospect of becoming Mrs. Bishop. [Pg 289]

A young wife, however, even as attractive as the fair Violet, was not, he told himself, exactly what he wanted. He had tried a period of double rule in which his sister was the power behind the throne, and it was infinitely worse than the present régime. No; if he took another helpmate, she must be a person of strong will, some one who could hold her own against all comers, some one who should have an inexhaustible fund of sympathy for his work, some one whose appreciation of the exalted position of the Bishop of Blanford should be so great as to blind her, occasionally at least, to those minor faults to which, Scripture tells us, all flesh is heir.

It was at just this point in his meditations that his Lordship, turning sharply round the corner of a large gooseberry-bush, came suddenly upon Mrs. Mackintosh. Their surprise was mutual, for the good lady had evidently been gardening, and was suffering from the rigour of the game. [Pg 290]

"That head man of yours is a duffer," she said sharply, pointing a very earthy trowel at the unconscious figure of the gardener, who was busy in the middle distance digging potatoes. "A man," she continued, "who calls a plain, every-day squash a vegetable marrow isn't fit to run a well-ordered truck-patch; though it's no more than might be expected in a country where they sell bread by the yard, and flour by the gallon. And what, I should like to know, is a 'punnet'?"

"I'm afraid, madam, I must confess my ignorance," replied the Bishop.

"I thought as much," she retorted. "And yet they put you in command of a diocese. Your gardener said to me this morning: 'I'll pick a "punnet" of strawberries to-day.' 'You'll do nothing of the kind,' I told him. 'Pick them in a Christian basket, or not at all.'"

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His Lordship laughed.

"It's some sort of measure, I imagine," he remarked.

"I shouldn't wonder. And your cook's just as bad. She asked me yesterday if I liked jugged hare. 'Let me see your jug,' said I, 'and then I'll tell you.' And as sure's I'm a sinner, she told me she never used one for that dish!"

"Now you speak of it," said his Lordship, "I don't think I ever saw one myself. But what are you doing this morning?"

"Straightening the peas."

"Straightening the peas?" he asked, thoroughly mystified.

"Yes, they're all waggly. When I plant my garden I take a string and two pegs and plant the seed along a line; but these just seem to be put in anyhow."

"Is it good for the peas?" asked the Bishop suspiciously, as he saw them being rooted up and reset.

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"I can't say," she returned sharply. "But things ought to be straight at an episcopal palace, if they are anywhere."

"So they should," he admitted mournfully, "but it's far from being the case. That's why I came out to consult you."

"Go ahead, then. You talk, and I'll dig."

And while the plants were being arranged to an ecclesiastical standard, he retailed to her the charges against Violet.

"Do you believe them?" she asked, jamming her trowel up to its hilt in the soft earth.

"Of course I do not."

"Right you are," she said. "I know the whole story, and it's nothing to be ashamed of, I give you my word."

"You relieve me immensely."

"It's merely American enterprise," continued the old lady. "That's why they call her the Leopard."

"The Leopard— I don't understand. She asked me to call her that."

"Well, I won't steal her thunder. She'll tell you herself."

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"But she is married?"

"Oh, yes."

The Bishop sighed.

"That disappoints you?" said Mrs. Mackintosh thoughtfully, balancing a pea-plant in her hand.

"Yes; at least I'd hoped—"

"I know. She told me. We haven't any secrets from each other."

"You see," continued his Lordship, "if my sister leaves me, I must have some one to take her place; otherwise—"

"She won't go."

"Yes," said the Bishop; "that's just the point."

"You ought to marry at once."

"I feel that myself; but then, you see, there's no one who would care to marry me—no one at least who—"

"You don't want a young chit."

"No," said his Lordship. "Somebody more like you."

Mrs. Mackintosh paused in her gardening.

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"Look here," she said. "Are you going to propose to me next?"

"I—was—thinking of it," admitted the Bishop.

"As a last resource?"

"My dear Mrs. Mackintosh!"

"I don't know as I ever could be a bishopess," replied that lady, inadvertently resetting a pea-plant upside down.

"There's Jonah," said the Bishop, resorting to diplomacy. "I shall never be able to complete that last volume without the spur of your appreciative criticism."

"Well," she replied, partially relenting, "I'd do a good deal for—Jonah."

"Then you will!" he cried.

"I've one row of those peas left," she returned, "and when I've reset them I'll give you your answer. That'll be in fifteen minutes. Now go away, or you'll fidget round, and I sha'n't get 'em straight." And without another word she resumed her digging.

Fifteen minutes later his Lordship was at her side.

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"There's one more plant left," remarked Mrs. Mackintosh, cleaning her trowel and addressing herself to the task.

"And are you going to say Yes when you have finished?"

"Yes," said the lady, "I am, but it's mostly on account of Jonah."

The Bishop ruthlessly set his foot on the tender shoot which intervened between him and happiness, crushing it to the earth.

Some time later Mrs. Mackintosh remarked:

"The cathedral clock is striking twelve, and you're due in the study."

"You mean, my dear, that *we* are due," replied his Lordship.

On their arrival in the Bishop's sanctum, they found the full force of the company assembled to receive them.

Miss Matilda looked on this gathering with suspicion.

"I do not see," she said, "the need of so many witnesses to what must prove, I fear, a humiliating confession." [Pg 296]

"I've come," returned Mrs. Mackintosh, "to lend moral support to—" She glanced at the Bishop, changed her mind, and supplemented—"Miss Arminster."

"Shall I speak?" asked Miss Matilda, ignoring her remark.

"I will speak," said his Lordship. "It is my house, and my place to do so."

His sister sat down hurriedly.

"I've sent for you, my dear," he continued, turning to Violet, "because certain charges have been made against you by Mr. Marchmont and—others, and, as my son informs me that you contemplate marrying Mr. Spotts, and asking me to perform the ceremony, I feel it is my duty—"

"She's already—" broke in his sister.

"I am speaking, Matilda," he said quietly, and she collapsed.

"You mustn't think," he went on, "that my asking you to explain your position implies any belief on my part in the charges made against you. I've only requested this interview because I thought you'd like an opportunity to disprove idle gossip." [Pg 297]

"It's very kind of you," she replied, "and I shall avail myself of it gladly."

"Quite so. Now my sister tells me that she's seen, in a neighbouring church, the record of your marriage to Mr. Spotts. Is this so?"

"Certainly," said Violet. "I married him there in 1895."

Miss Matilda sniffed viciously.

"Mr. Marchmont," continued the Bishop, "in whose statements, I need hardly say, I place no reliance, informed my sister that you had been married with unusual frequency; and my son tells me, also, that you've admitted to him a—er—a considerable number of—er—matrimonial alliances. Would you—er—er—consider it an intrusion on my part if I asked how many times you have been married?"

"I've had the marriage service performed over me," she replied, "thirty-seven times in four years." [Pg 298]

Miss Matilda threw up her hands in an access of horror.

"But your husbands—" stammered his Lordship.

"I never had but one husband," she said. "And here he stands." And she took Spotts's hand in hers.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Bishop. "You surely haven't married him thirty-seven times?"

"Yes, that is exactly the case," she returned.

"But I don't understand."

"The explanation is very simple," she replied. "My husband and I are both actors. He plays the part of the hero, and I the part of the heroine. In the fifth act, after many struggles and disappointments, we're at last united. To have the marriage ceremony actually performed on the stage, or the next day at church, has always proved a great attraction to our audiences. At first I objected. But I've been informed by a competent authority in my own country that there's no canonical rule against it, and in remarrying my husband I merely renew my vows to him, and I've never once gone through the ceremony lightly or thoughtlessly. I do not defend the practice, or expect you to approve of it, and, now that you know the truth, I shouldn't think of asking you to marry us again; but I don't consider that I've done anything of which I need be ashamed." [Pg 299]

"Dear me!" said the Bishop. "In my ecclesiastical position I can hardly approve of the course you've taken; but as a man—well, it's a great relief to me."

"I consider it a sacrilege," exclaimed Miss Matilda, "and, as I remarked to Cecil this morning, that young person leaves the palace to-day, or I do!"

"You'll naturally act as seems to you best," said her brother. "But I beg you to remember that I'm master of this house, and that this lady is my guest."

"And who, pray, will keep your house for you when I'm gone?" she snapped.

"I'm sure that Mrs. Spotts will attend to it for me until Mrs. Mackintosh and I are married."

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"Till you're married!" his sister repeated after him, too astounded to grasp fully the meaning of his words.

"It is an event which I hope will occur shortly," her brother replied.

"That's enough!" she retorted. "I leave Blanford this afternoon!"

"I trust you'll not go in anger, Matilda," he said. "I'm sure a change will do you good. Miss Arminster—I mean Mrs. Spotts—suggests a course of mud-baths; and if you'll permit me to assume the expense—"

"Josephus!" she returned shortly, "do not add insult to injury." And she swept from the room.

"I, too," said Professor Tybalt Smith, who had hitherto remained silent—"I, too, must be permitted to excuse myself. It may be that I can comfort that injured lady in her exile." And he followed her out.

"Oh, I'm delighted!" cried Violet, seizing Mrs. Mackintosh's hand.

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"And I, too," said Cecil.

"Thank you," replied his stepmother-to-be. "That pleases me more than anything else. I hope you'll really make Blanford your home."

"I shall indeed," he returned, "since no one will have me as a husband."

"You've the great success of your book to comfort you," suggested Violet. "What more can you ask?"

"Well, as it seems a day of explanations," he said, "I should really like to know why you're called 'the Leopard'?"

"It's a very trifling secret after all," she replied, laughing. "But to have let you know it would have given away our little plot. Now it doesn't matter. Tell him, Alvy."

"It's merely this," said her husband gaily: "that, as much as she may marry, HIS LORDSHIP'S LEOPARD CAN NEVER CHANGE HER SPOT(T)S."

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