

Wells David Dwight

Her Ladyship's Elephant



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Her Ladyship's Elephant:

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A WORD TO THE WISE

A well-known English novelist once told me that of all his published works – and their name is legion – one only had been founded on fact, and that one his critics united in condemning as impossible and unnatural. In the case of my own little book, I venture to forestall such criticism by stating that while the characters which appear in its pages are at the most only composite photographs, the one "impossible" and "unnatural" figure, the elephant, had his foundation in actual fact; and the history of its acquirement by the Consul, as hereinafter set forth, is the truthful narration of an actual experience, one of many episodes, stranger than fiction, which went to form the warp and woof of my diplomatic experience.

DAVID DWIGHT WELLS.

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE SAME QUESTION IS ANSWERED IN TWO WAYS

Harold Stanley Malcolm St. Hubart Scarsdale, Esq., of "The Towers," Sussex, sat uncomfortably on a very comfortable chair. His patent-leather boots were manifestly new, his trousers fresh from the presser, his waistcoat immaculate, while his frock coat with its white gardenia, and his delicate grey suede gloves, completed an admirable toilet. He was, in short, got up for the occasion, a thoroughly healthy, muscular, well-groomed animal; good-natured too, fond in his big-hearted boyish way of most other animals, and enough of a sportsman to find no pleasure in winging tame or driven grouse and pheasants. He was possessed, moreover, of sufficient brains to pass with credit an examination which gave him a post in the War Office, and had recently become, owing to the interposition of Providence and a restive mare, the eldest son.

In spite of all this, he was very much out of his depth as he sat there; for he was face to face with a crisis in his life, and that crisis was embodied in a woman. And such a woman! — quite unlike anything his conservative British brain had ever seen or imagined before the present London season: a mixture of Parisian daintiness and coquetry, nicely tempered by Anglo-

Saxon breeding and common sense – in a word, an American.

He had come to propose to her, or rather she had sent for him, to what end he hardly knew. Of this only was he certain, that she had turned his world topsy-turvy; cast down his conventional gods; admired him for what he considered his fallings-off from the established order of things; laughed at his great coups; cared not a whit for his most valued possessions; and become, in short, the most incomprehensible, bewitching, lovable woman on earth.

He had talked to her about the weather, the opera, the Court Ball, and now – now he must speak to her of his love, unless, blessed reprieve! she spoke first – which she did.

"Now, Mr. Scarsdale," she remarked, "I have not sent for you to talk amiable society nonsense: I want an explanation."

"Yes, Miss Vernon," he replied, nerving himself for the ordeal.

"Why did you propose to Aunt Eliza at the Andersons' crush last night?"

"Because – " he faltered. "Well, really, you see she is your only relative in England – your chaperon – and it is customary here to address offers of marriage to the head of the family."

"I really don't see why you want to marry her," continued his tormentor. "She is over sixty. Oh, you needn't be shocked; Aunt Eliza is not sensitive about her age, and it is well to look these things fairly in the face. You can't honestly call her handsome, though she is a dear good old soul, but, I fear, too inured to Chicago to assimilate readily with English society. Of course her

private means are enormous – "

"Good heavens! Miss Vernon," he exclaimed, "there has been some dreadful mistake! I entertain the highest respect for your aunt, Miss Cogbill, but I don't wish to marry her; I wish to marry – somebody else – "

"Really! Why don't you propose to Miss Somebody Else in person, then?"

"It is usual – " he began, but she cut him short, exclaiming:

"Oh, bother! Excuse me, I didn't mean to be rude, but really, you know, any girl who was old enough to marry would be quite capable of giving you your – answer." The last word, after a pause for consideration, was accompanied by a bewitching, if ambiguous, smile.

"I – I hope you are not offended," he floundered on, in desperate straits by this time.

"Oh dear, no," she returned serenely, "I'm only grieved for Aunt Eliza. You shouldn't have done it, really; it must have upset her dreadfully; she's too old for that sort of thing. Do tell me what she said to you."

"She said I must propose on my own account," he blurted out, "and that she could not pretend to advise me."

"Clever Aunt Eliza!" murmured Miss Vernon.

"So you see," continued her lover, determined to have it over and know the worst, "I came to you."

"For more advice?" she queried, and, receiving no answer, continued demurely: "Of course I haven't the remotest idea

whom you mean to honour, but it does seem to me that the wives of Englishmen allow themselves to be treated shamefully, and I once made out a list of objections which I always said I would present to any Englishman who proposed to me. Of course," she hastened to add, "you will probably marry an English girl, who won't mind."

"I haven't said so!" he interjected.

"No," she said meditatively, "you haven't. I'll tell you what they are if you wish."

"Do," he begged.

"Well, in the first place," she continued, "I should refuse to be a 'chattel.'"

"Oh I say – " he began. But she went on, unheeding his expostulation:

"Then my husband couldn't beat me, not even once, though the law allows it."

"What do you take us for?" he exclaimed.

"Then," she proceeded, "he would have to love me better than his horses and his dogs."

"Oh I say! Mabel," he burst out, teased beyond all limits of endurance, "don't chaff me; I'm awfully in earnest, you know, and if you will accept what little I have to offer – three thousand a year, and 'The Towers,' now poor Bob's gone – " He paused, but she made no answer, only he noticed that all of a sudden she had become very serious.

"Lady Mary, my mother, you know, would of course leave the

place to you at once, but there's no title; my father was only a knight. I'm sorry – "

"Oh," she replied, "I wouldn't have married you if you had had one; quite enough of my countrywomen have made fools of themselves on that account."

"Then you will marry me!" he cried, and sprang towards her. She saw her slip and tried to correct it.

"I haven't said – " she began, but the sentence was never finished; for Harold Stanley Malcolm St. Hubart Scarsdale, of "The Towers," Sussex, closed the argument and the lips of Miss Mabel Vernon, of Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., at one and the same time.

Robert Allingford, United States Consul at Christchurch, England, and Marion, youngest daughter of Sir Peter and Lady Steele, were seated on the balcony of the Hyde Park Club one hot afternoon. Everybody had gone down to the races at Goodwood, and the season was drawing its last gasp. The "Row," which they overlooked, was almost deserted, save for an occasional depressed brougham, while the stretches of the Park beyond were given over to nursemaids and their attendant "Tommies" and "Bobbies."

Mamma was there, of course. One must be conventional in London, even in July; but she was talking to the other man, Jack Carrington, who had been invited especially for that purpose, and was doing his duty nobly.

The afternoon tea had been cleared away, and the balcony was

deserted. In another week Marion would go into the country, and he would return to his consulate. He might never have such another chance. Opportunities for a proposal are so rare in London that it does not do to miss them. A ball affords almost the only opening, and when one remembers the offers to which one has been a third party, on the other side of a thin paper screen – well, it makes a man cautious.

Robert Allingford had planned and worked up this tea with patience and success. Jack was to be best man, in consideration of his devotion to mamma – provided, of course, that the services of a best man should be required. On this point Allingford was doubtful. He was sure that Lady Steele understood; he knew that Sir Peter had smiled on him indulgently for the past fortnight; his friends chaffed him about it openly at dinners and at the club; but Marion – he was very far from certain if she comprehended the state of affairs in the slightest degree.

He had given her river-parties, box-parties, dinners, flowers, candy – in short, paid her every possible attention; but then she expected Americans to do so; it was "just their way," and "didn't mean anything."

He greatly feared that his proposal would be a shock to her, and English girls, he had been told, did not like shocks. He wondered if it would have been better to ask Lady Steele for her daughter's hand, but this he felt was beyond him. Proposing was bad enough anyway, but to attempt a declaration in cold blood – he simply couldn't. Moreover he felt that it must be now or never.

Jack had been giving him the field for five minutes already, and he had not even made a beginning. He would go in and get it over.

"You are leaving town next week," he said. "I shall miss you."

"You have been very good to me," she replied simply.

"Good to myself, you mean. It is the greatest pleasure I have in life to give you pleasure, Marion."

"Mr. Allingford!" she said, half rising. He had used her Christian name for the first time.

"Forgive me if I call you Marion," he went on, noting with relief that her ladyship was talking charity bazaar to Jack, and so assuring him from interruption.

"I mean, give me the right to do so. You see I'm awfully in love with you; I can't help loving the sweetest girl I know. You must have seen how I cared."

"Lately, yes – I have suspected it," she answered in a low voice.

"Do you mind? I can't help it if you do. I'll love you anyway, but I want you to be my wife, to care for me just a little; I don't ask more."

"I think you must speak to mamma."

"But I don't wish – I mean, can't you give me something to go on – some assurance?"

She blushed and looked down, repeating the phrase, "I think you must speak to mamma."

"Is that equivalent – " he began; then he saw that it was, and added, "My darling!"

Her head sank lower, he had her hand in a moment, and

wondered if he might venture to kiss her, screened as they both were by her sunshade, but hesitated to do so because of the ominous silence at the other end of the balcony.

"If you have nothing better to do this evening," said Lady Steele's voice to him, "come to us. Sir Peter and I are dining at home, and if you will partake of a family dinner with us we shall be delighted."

He bowed his acceptance.

"Come, Marion," her ladyship continued. "We have spent a charming afternoon, Mr. Allingford, thanks to your hospitality. We are at home on Thursdays after September; Mr. Carrington, you must come and hear more about my bazaar." And they were gone.

Jack stepped to the bell. "Well, Bob," he said to Allingford, "is it brandy and soda or champagne?"

"Champagne," replied that gentleman.

"Then," remarked Carrington, after ordering a bottle of '80 "Perrier" – "then, Bob, my boy, let me congratulate you."

"I think I deserve it," he replied, as he wrung his friend's hand; "for I believe I have won for my wife the most charming girl in London."

"I am awfully glad for you," said Carrington, "and I consider her a very lucky young woman."

"I don't know about that," returned Allingford, "and I'm sure I don't see what she can find to care for in me. Why, we hardly know each other. I've only met her in public, and not over a

couple of dozen times at that."

"Oh, you will find it much more fun becoming acquainted after you are engaged. Our English conventions are beautifully Chinese in some respects."

Allingford laughed, saying: "I don't know that I'm going to be engaged. I can't imagine why her family should approve of the match; I haven't a title and never can have, and I'm only in consular service. Now if I had been a diplomat – "

"My dear fellow," said Carrington, "you seem to forget that you have a few dozen copper-mines at your disposal, and a larger income than you can conveniently spend. Her people haven't forgotten it, however, as I'll venture to prophesy that you'll find out before to-morrow morning. As for your being an American and a Consul, that doesn't count. Just make the settlements sufficiently large, and as long as you don't eat with your knife or drink out of your finger-bowl they will pardon the rest as amiable eccentricities."

"You are a cynic, Carrington, and I don't believe it," said Allingford, rising to go. "Anyway, what do you know about marriage?"

"Nothing, and I am not likely to," rejoined his friend, "but I've lived in London."

The dinner that night at Belgrave Square did not serve to put the Consul at his ease. True, he sat by Marion, but no word was spoken of what had passed that afternoon, and he could not help feeling that he was in an anomalous position. He had on

his company manners, and was not at his best in consequence. He felt he was being watched and would be criticised in the drawing-room after dinner, which made him nervous. Sir Peter had several married daughters, one of whom was present, and Allingford wondered how their husbands had behaved under similar circumstances. He gave Lady Steele, at whose right he sat, ample opportunity to question him concerning his family history and future plans and prospects – a chance of which she was not slow to avail herself.

When the ladies had departed and had left the two gentlemen to their coffee and cigars, Sir Peter lost no time in opening the question, and said, somewhat bluntly:

"So I hear that you wish to marry my daughter."

The Consul signified that such was the case.

"I'm sure I don't know why," resumed her father, with true British candour. "I become so used to my children that I sometimes wonder what other people can see in them. Marion is a good little girl, however, I'll say that for her – a good little girl and not extravagant."

Sir Peter's manner was reassuring, and Allingford hastened to say that he was sensible of the great honour Miss Steele had done him in considering his suit, and that he should strive to prove himself worthy of her.

"I don't doubt it, my dear fellow, I don't doubt it." And the baronet paused, smiling so amiably that the Consul was disconcerted, and began to fear an unpleasant surprise.

"I trust," he returned, "that you are not averse to me as a son-in-law?"

"Personally much the reverse; but I always ask the man who comes to me as you have done one question, and on his answer I base my approval or disapproval of his suit."

"And that question is?"

"Can you support a wife, Mr. Allingford?"

"As a gentleman I could not have asked her hand if such were not the case."

"Ah," replied Sir Peter, "that is quite right."

"As for my position – " continued the young man.

"You hold a public office in the service of your country. I consider that sufficient guarantee of your position, both moral and social."

Allingford, who knew something of American practical politics, thought this by no means followed, but forbore to say so, and Sir Peter continued:

"Have you any family?"

"No relations in the world except my younger brother, Dick, who manages the property at home, while I play at politics abroad."

"I see," said his host. "One question more and I have done. I dislike talking business after dinner – it should be left to the lawyers; but, seeing that you are an American and do not understand such things, I thought – "

The Consul stopped him by a gesture. "You are referring to

the settlements, Sir Peter," he said. "Set your mind at rest on that score. I'll do the proper thing."

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course; I don't doubt that for a moment. But – er – you won't think me mercenary if I ask you to be – in short – more definite. I speak most disinterestedly, purely out of consideration for my daughter's future."

Allingford frowned slightly as Carrington's prophecy came back to him. His prospective father-in-law was quite within his rights in speaking as he did, but why couldn't he have left it at least till to-morrow?

"Would a copper-mine do?" he said, looking up. "I'd give her a copper-mine."

"Really, I don't know what to say," replied Sir Peter, in some perplexity. "I'm quite ignorant of such matters. Are – er – copper-mines valuable?"

"The one I'm thinking of has been worth a quarter of a million since it started, and we have only begun to work it," replied the Consul.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated his host. "You don't say so! Do you go in much for that sort of thing?"

"Yes, I've quite a number."

"Dear me!" said Sir Peter dreamily, "a quarter of a million." Then waking up he added: "But I'm forgetting the time. My dear Allingford – er – your Christian name escapes me."

"Robert, Sir Peter."

"Thanks. I was going to say, my dear Robert, that you must

go upstairs and see mamma."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE CONSUL LOSES A RELATIVE AND GAINS A WIFE

When Robert Allingford entered the smoking-room of his club, one afternoon early in October, he was genuinely glad to find that it had but one occupant, and that he was Harold Scarsdale. The two men had met each other for the first time at a house-party some eighteen months before, and their acquaintance had ripened into true friendship.

"Hello!" he cried, accosting that gentleman. "You're enjoying to the full your last hours of bachelor bliss, I see."

"Speak for yourself," replied Scarsdale, who looked extremely bored. "You're also on the dizzy brink."

"It's a fact," admitted the Consul; "we are both to be married to-morrow. But that is all the more reason why we should make the most of our remaining freedom. You look as glum as if you'd lost your last friend. Come, cheer up, and have something to drink."

"They say," remarked the Englishman as he acquiesced in the Consul's suggestion, "that a man only needs to be married to find out of how little importance he really is; but I've been anticipating my fate. Miss Vernon's rooms are a wilderness of the vanities of life, and here I am, banished to the club as a stern reality."

"Quite so," replied the American. "I'm in the same box. The dressmakers have driven me clean out of Belgrave Square. But you, you really have my sympathy, for you are to marry one of my countrywomen, and they are apt to prove rather exacting mistresses at times like these."

"Oh, I'm fairly well treated," said Scarsdale; "much better than I deserve, I dare say. How is it with you?"

"Oh," laughed Allingford, "I feel as if I were playing a game of blind man's buff with English conventionalities: at least I seem to run foul of them most of the time. I used to imagine that getting married was a comparatively simple matter; but what with a highly complicated ceremony and an irresponsible best man, my cup of misery is well-nigh overflowing."

"I suppose you have been doing your required fifteen days of residence in the parish? London is slow work, now every one is out of town," remarked Scarsdale.

"My second-best hand-bag has been residing for the past fortnight in an adjacent attic, in fulfilment of the law," returned the American; "but affairs at the consulate have kept me on post more than I could have wished."

"I should not think you would have much business at this season of the year."

"On the contrary, it is just the time when the migratory American, who has spent the summer in doing Europe, returns to England dead broke, and expects, nay, demands, to be helped home."

"Do you have many cases of that sort?"

"Lots. In fact, one especially importunate fellow nearly caused me to lose my train for London yesterday. I gave him what he asked to get rid of him."

"I suppose that sort of thing is a good deal like throwing money into the sea," said Scarsdale. "It never comes back."

"Not often, I regret to say; but in this case my distressed countryman put up collateral."

"Indeed. I trust you can realise on it if need be."

"I don't think I want to," said the Consul, "seeing it's an elephant."

"What!" cried Scarsdale.

"An elephant, or rather, to be exact, an order for one to be delivered by the Nubian and Red Sea Line of freighters in two or three days at Southampton Docks. My friend promises to redeem it before arrival, expects advices from the States, &c., but meanwhile is terribly hard up."

"I hope he will be true to his promises, otherwise I wish you joy of your elephant. You might give it to Lady Steele," suggested Scarsdale.

"Yes. I think I can see it tethered to the railings in Belgrave Square," remarked the Consul; "but I am not losing sleep on that account, for, though I've informed the steamship people that I am, temporarily, the owner of the beast, I more than suspect that the order and the elephant are both myths. But I have been telling you of my affairs long enough; how go yours?"

"Swimmingly," replied the Englishman. "Miss Vernon has only one relative in England, thank Heaven! but my family have settled down on me in swarms."

"Is Lady Diana Melton in town for the occasion?" asked Allingford.

Scarsdale flushed, and for the moment did not reply.

"I beg your pardon," said the American, "if I have asked an unfortunate question."

"Not at all," replied his friend. "My great-aunt, who, as you know, is a somewhat determined old person, has the bad taste to dislike Americans. So she has confined herself to a frigid refusal of our wedding invitation, and sent an impossible spoon to the bride."

"So you are not to have her country place for your honeymoon," said Allingford. "From what I have heard of Melton Court, it would be quite an ideal spot under the circumstances."

"No, we are not going there. The fact is, I don't know where we are going," added Scarsdale.

"Really!"

"Yes. As you were saying just now, your countrywomen are apt to prove exacting, and the future Mrs. Scarsdale has taken it into her head that I am much too prosaic to plan a wedding trip – that I would do the usual round, in fact, and that she would be bored in consequence; so she has taken the arrangements upon herself, and the whole thing is to be a surprise for me. I don't

even know the station from which we start."

"I'm afraid I can't commiserate you," returned Allingford, laughing, "for I'm guilty of doing the very same thing myself, and my bride elect has no idea of our destination. She spends most of her spare time in trying to guess it."

At this moment a card was handed to Allingford, who said: "Why, here is my best man, Jack Carrington. You know him, don't you? I wonder what can have started him on my trail," and he requested the page to show him up.

A moment later Carrington entered the room. He was one of the best-dressed, most perfect-mannered young men in London, the friend of every one who knew him, a thoroughly delightful and irresponsible creature. To-day, however, there was a seriousness about his face that proclaimed his mission to be of no very pleasant character.

After greeting his friends, he asked for a few words in private with his principal, and as a result of this colloquy Allingford excused himself to Scardsdale, saying that he must return to his lodgings at once, as Carrington had brought him news that his brother Dick had arrived unexpectedly from America, and was awaiting him there.

"What a delightful surprise for you!" exclaimed Scarsdale.

"Yes, very – of course," returned Allingford drily; and after a mutual interchange of congratulations on the events of the morrow, and regrets that neither could be at the wedding of the other, the Consul and his best man left the club.

"He did not seem over-enthusiastic at Carrington's news," mused Scarsdale, and then his mind turned to his own affairs.

It was not astonishing that Robert Allingford received the news of his brother's arrival without any show of rejoicing. A family skeleton is never an enjoyable possession, but when it is not even decently interred, but very much alive, and in the shape of a brother who has attained notoriety as a black sheep of an unusually intense dye, it may be looked upon as little less than a curse.

Yet there were redeeming qualities about Dick Allingford. In spite of his thoroughly bad name, he was one of the most kind-hearted and engaging of men, while the way in which he had managed his own and his brother's property left nothing to be desired. Moreover, he was quite in his element among his miners. Indeed his qualities, good and bad, were of a kind that endeared him to them. He loved the good things of this life, however, in a wholly uncontrollable manner, and, as his income afforded almost unlimited scope for these desires, his achievements would have put most yellow-covered novels to the blush. Dick's redeeming virtue was a blind devotion to his elder brother, from whom he demanded unlimited advice and assistance in extricating him from a thousand-and-one scrapes, and inexhaustible patience and forgiveness for those peccadilloes. When Robert had taken a public office in England it was on the distinct understanding that Richard should confine his attentions to America, and so far he had not violated the

contract. The Consul had taken care that his brother should not be informed of the day of his marriage until it was too late for him to attend in person, for he shuddered to think of the rig that Richard would run in staid and conventional English society. Accordingly he hastened to his lodgings, full of anxious fore-bodings. On arrival his worst fears were fulfilled. Dick received him with open arms, very affectionate, very penitent, and very drunk. From that gentleman's somewhat disconnected description the Consul obtained a lurid inkling of what seemed to have been a triumphal progress of unrestrained dissipation from Southampton to London, of which indignant barmaids and a wrecked four-in-hand formed the most redeeming features.

"Now explain yourself!" cried Robert in wrath, at the conclusion of his brother's recital. "What do you mean by this disgraceful conduct, and why are you in England at all?"

"Saw 'proaching marriage – newspaper," hiccoughed Dick – "took first steamer."

"What did you come for?" demanded Allingford sternly.

"Come? Congratulate you – see the bride."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed the Consul. "You are beastly drunk and not fit for decent society."

"Fault – railroad company – bad whisky," explained the unregenerate one.

"I'll take your word for it," replied his brother. "You ought to be a judge of whisky. But you won't go to my wedding unless you are sober." And he rang for his valet.

"This is my brother, Parsons," he remarked to that individual when he entered. "You may put him to bed at once. Use my room for the purpose, and engage another for me for to-night."

"Yes, sir," replied his valet, who was too well trained to betray any emotion.

"When you have got him settled," continued the Consul, "lock him in, and let him stay till morning." With which he straightway departed, leaving his stupefied brother to the tender mercies of the shocked and sedate Parsons.

Allingford stood a good deal in awe of his valet, and dreaded to see the reproachful look of outraged dignity which he knew would greet him on his return. So he again sought the club, intending to find Scarsdale and continue their conversation; but that gentleman had departed, and the Consul was forced to console himself with a brandy and soda, and settle down to a quiet hour of reflection.

He had been engaged upwards of three months, and, it is needless to say, had learned much in that space of time. An engagement is a liberal education to any man, for it presents a series of entirely new problems to be solved. He ceases to think of and for himself alone, and the accuracy with which he can adjust himself to these novel conditions determines the success or failure of his married life. Robert Allingford, however, was engaged to a woman of another nation; of his own race, indeed, and speaking his own tongue, but educated under widely differing standards and ideals, and on a plane of comparative

simplicity when viewed in the light of her complex American sister. The little English girl was an endless mystery to him, and it was only in later life that he discovered that he was constantly endowing her with a complicated nature which she did not possess. He could not understand a woman who generally – I do not say invariably, for Marion Steele was human after all, but who generally meant what she said, whose pleasures were healthy and direct, and who was really simple and genuinely ignorant of most things pertaining to the world worldly. He knew that world well enough – ten years of mining had taught him that – and he had been left to its tender mercies when still a boy, with no relatives except his younger brother, who, as may well be imagined, was rather a burden than a help.

But if Robert Allingford had seen the rough side of life, it had taught him to understand human nature, and, as he had been blessed with a large heart and a considerable measure of adaptability, he managed to get on very well on both sides of the Atlantic. True, he seldom appreciated what the British mind held to contain worth; but he was tolerant, and his tolerance begat, unconsciously, sympathy. On the other hand, the Consul was as much of a mystery to his fiancée as she had ever been to him. In her eyes he was always doing the unexpected. For one thing, she never knew when to take him seriously, and was afraid of what he might do or say; but she soon learned to trust him implicitly, and to estimate him at his true sterling worth.

In short, both had partially adjusted themselves to each

other, and were likely to live very happily, with enough of the unknown in their characters to keep them from becoming bored. Allingford had never spoken definitely to his fiancée concerning his younger brother, and she knew instinctively that it was a subject to be avoided. To her father she had said something, but Sir Peter had little interest in his children's affairs beyond seeing that they were suitably married; and since he was satisfied with the settlements and the man, was content to leave well enough alone.

The Consul, therefore, thought himself justified in saying nothing about the unexpected arrival of his brother, especially as the chances of that gentleman's being in a fit state to appear at the wedding seemed highly problematical.

Next morning there were no signs of repentance or of Dick; for if a deserted bed, an open window, and the smashed glass of a neighbouring skylight signified anything, it was that Mr. Richard Allingford was still unregenerate and at large.

The bridal day dawned bright and clear, and Carrington lunched with the Consul just before the ceremony, which, thanks to English law, took place at that most impossible hour of the day, 2.30 p. m.

The bridegroom floundered through the intricacies of the service, signed his name in the vestry, and achieved his carriage in a kind of dream; but woke up sufficiently to the realities of life at the reception, to endure with fortitude the indiscriminate kissing of scores of new relations. Then he drank his own health

and the healths of other people, and at last escaped upstairs to prepare for the journey and have a quiet fifteen minutes with his best man.

"Now remember," he said to that irresponsible individual, "you are the only one who knows our destination this evening, and if you breathe it to a soul I'll come back and murder you."

"My dear fellow," replied Carrington, "you don't suppose, after I've endured weeks of cross-questioning and inquisitorial advances from the bride and her family, that I am going to strike my colours and give the whole thing away at the eleventh hour."

"You have been a trump, Jack," rejoined the Consul, "and I only wish you may be as happy some time as I am to-day."

"It is your day; don't worry about my affairs," returned Carrington, with a forced laugh which gave colour to the popular report that the only vulnerable point in his armour of good nature lay in his impecunious condition and the consequent impossibility of his marrying on his own account.

It was only a passing cloud, however, and he hastened to change the subject, saying: "Come, you are late already, and a bride must not be kept waiting."

Allingford was thereupon hustled downstairs, and wept upon from all quarters, and his life was threatened with rice and old shoes; but he reached the street somehow with Mrs. Robert in tow, and, barring the circumstance that in his agitation he had embraced the butler instead of Sir Peter, he acquitted himself very well under the trying ordeal.

As they drove to the station his wife was strangely quiet, and he rallied her on the fact.

"Why," he said, "you haven't spoken since we started."

Her face grew troubled. "I was wondering – " she began.

"If you would be happy?" he asked. "I'll do my best."

"No, no, I'm sure of that, only – do tell me where we are going."

The Consul laughed. "You women are just the same all the world over," he replied, but otherwise did not commit himself; but his wife noticed that he looked worried and anxious, and that he breathed a sigh of unmistakable relief as their train drew out of Waterloo Station. She did not know that the one cloud which he had feared might darken his wedding day had now been dispelled: he had seen nothing of his brother.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE LONDON AND SOUTH WESTERN RAIL-WAY ACCOMPLISHES WHAT THE MARRIAGE SERVICE FORBIDS

It might be supposed that the heir to "The Towers" and Lady Scarsdale's very considerable property would meet with some decided opposition from his family to his proposed alliance with Mabel Vernon, an unknown American, who, though fairly provided with this world's goods, could in no sense be termed a great heiress. But the fact of the matter was that the prejudices of his own people were as nothing when compared with those of Aunt Eliza. In the first place she did not wish her niece to marry at all, on the ground that no man was good enough for her; and in the second place she had decided that if Mabel must have a partner in life, he was to be born under the Stars and Stripes. Her wrath, therefore, was great when she heard of the engagement, and she declared that she had a good mind to cut the young couple off with a cent, a threat that meant something from a woman who had bought corner lots in Chicago immediately after the great fire, and still held them. Scarsdale never forgot his first interview with her after she had learned the news.

"I mistrusted you were round for no good," she said, "though I wasn't quite certain which one of us you wanted."

He bit his lip.

"There's nothing to laugh at, young man," she continued severely; "marrying me would have been no joke."

"I'm sure, Miss Cogbill – " began Scarsdale.

"You call me Aunt Eliza in the future," she broke in; "that is who I am, and if I choose to remember your wife when I'm gone she'll be as rich as a duchess, as I dare say you know."

"I had no thought of your leaving her anything, and I am quite able to support her without your assistance," he replied, nettled by her implication.

"I am glad to hear it; it sounds encouraging," returned the aunt. "Tell me, have you ever done anything to support yourself?"

"Rather! As a younger son, I should have had a very poor chance if I'd not."

"How many towers have you got?" was her next question.

"I don't know," said Scarsdale, laughing at her very literal interpretation of the name of his estate.

"Have they fire-escapes?"

"I'm afraid not," he replied, "but you must come and see for yourself. My mother will be happy to welcome you."

"No, I guess not; I'm too old to start climbing."

"Oh, you wouldn't have to live in them," he hastened to assure her; "there are other parts to the house, and my mother – "

"That's her ladyship?"

"Yes."

"You are sure you haven't any title?" asked Aunt Eliza suspiciously.

"No, nor any chance of having one."

"Well, I do feel relieved," she commented. "The Psalms say not to put your trust in princes, but I guess if King David had ever been through a London season he wouldn't have drawn the line there; and what's good enough for him is good enough for me."

"I think you can trust me, Aunt Eliza."

"I hope so, though I never expected to see a niece of mine married to a man of war."

"Not a man of war," he corrected, "only a man in the War Office – a very different thing, I assure you."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," she replied. "Now run along to Mabel, and I'll write your mother and tell her that I guess you'll do." Which she straightway did, and that letter is still preserved as one of the literary curiosities of "The Towers," Sussex.

The first meeting of Aunt Eliza and Lady Scarsdale took place the day before the wedding. It was pleasant, short, and to the point, and at its conclusion each parted from the other with mingled feelings of wonder and respect. Indeed, no one could fail to respect Miss Cogbill. Alone and unaided she had amassed and managed a great fortune. She was shrewd and keen beyond the nature of women, and seldom minced matters in her speech; but nevertheless she was possessed of much native refinement and prim, old-time courtesy that did not always seem in accordance

with the business side of her nature.

As time went on she became reconciled to Scarsdale, but his lack of appreciation of business was a thorn in her flesh, and, indeed, her inclinations had led her in quite another direction.

"Now look at that young Carrington who comes to see you once in a while; if you had to marry an Englishman, why didn't you take him?" she said once to her niece.

"Why, Aunt Eliza," replied that young lady, "what are you thinking of? According to your own standards, he is much less desirable than Harold, for he has not a cent."

"He'd make money fast enough if his training didn't get in his way," she retorted, "which is more than can be said of your future husband."

The wedding was very quiet, at Miss Vernon's suggestion and with her aunt's approval, for neither of them cared for that lavish display with which a certain class of Americans are, unfortunately, associated. There was to be a reception at the hotel, to which a large number of people had been asked; but at the ceremony scarcely a dozen were present. Scarsdale's mother and immediate family, a brother official, who served as best man, and Aunt Eliza made up the party.

At the bride's request, the service had been as much abbreviated as the Church would allow, and the whole matter was finished in a surprisingly short space of time. The reception followed, and an hour later the happy pair were ready to leave; but their destination was still a mystery to the groom.

"I think you might just give me a hint," he suggested to Aunt Eliza, whom he shrewdly suspected knew all about it.

"Do you?" she replied. "Well, I think that Mabel is quite capable of taking care of herself and you too, and that the sooner you realise it the better. As for your being consulted or informed about your wedding trip, why, my niece has been four times round the world already, and is better able to plan an ordinary honeymoon excursion than a man who spends his time turning out bombs, and nitro-glycerine, and monitors, and things."

Aunt Eliza's notions of the duties of the War Office were still somewhat vague.

After the bridal couple had left, Miss Cogbill and Lady Scarsdale received the remaining guests, and, when the function was over, her ladyship gave her American relative a cordial invitation to stay at "The Towers" till after the honeymoon; but Aunt Eliza refused.

"I'll come some day and be glad to," she said; "but I'm off to-morrow for two weeks in Paris. I always go there when I'm blue; it cheers one up so, and you meet more Americans there nowadays than you do at home."

"Perhaps you will see the happy pair before you return," suggested Lady Scarsdale.

"Now, your ladyship," said Aunt Eliza, "that isn't fair; but to tell you the truth of the matter, I've no more idea where they are going, beyond their first stop, than you have."

"And that is – ?"

"They will write you from there to-morrow," replied Miss Cogbill, "and then you will know as much as I do."

Scarsdale was quite too happy to be seriously worried over his ignorance of their destination; in fact, he was rather amused at his wife's little mystery, and, beyond indulging in some banter on the subject, was well content to let the matter drop. He entertained her, however, by making wild guesses as to where they were to pass the night from what he had learned of their point of departure, Waterloo Station; but soon turned to more engrossing topics, and before he realised it an hour had passed away, and the train began to slow up for their first stop out of London.

"Is this the end of our journey?" he queried.

"What, Basingstoke?" she cried. "How could you think I'd be so unromantic? Why, it is only a miserable, dirty railway junction!"

"Perhaps we change carriages here?"

"Wrong again; but the train stops for a few minutes, and if you'll be good you may run out and have a breath of fresh air and something to drink."

"How do you know," he asked, "that I sha'n't go forward and see how the luggage is labelled?"

"That would not be playing fair," she replied, pouting, "and I should be dreadfully cross with you."

"I'll promise to be good," he hastened to assure her, and, as the train drew up, stepped out upon the platform.

His first intention had been to make straight for the

refreshment-room; but he had only taken a few steps in that direction, when he saw advancing from the opposite end of the train none other than Robert Allingford, who, like himself, was a bridegroom of that day.

"Why, Benedick!" he cried, "who would have thought of meeting you!"

"Just what I was going to say," replied the Consul, heartily shaking his outstretched hand. "I never imagined that we would select the same train. Come, let's have a drink to celebrate our auspicious meeting. There is time enough."

"Are you sure?" asked the careful Englishman.

"Quite," replied his American friend. "I asked a porter, and he said we had ten minutes."

They accordingly repaired to the luncheon-bar, and were soon discussing whiskies and sodas.

"Tell me," said the Consul, as he put down his glass, "have you discovered your destination yet?"

"Haven't the remotest idea," returned the other. "Mrs. Scarsdale insisted on buying the tickets, and watches over them jealously. If it had not been for the look of the thing, I would have bribed the guard to tell me where I was going. By the way, won't you shake hands with my wife? She is just forward."

"With pleasure," replied Allingford, "if you will return the compliment; my carriage is the first of its class at the rear of the train. We have still six minutes." With which the two husbands separated, each to seek the other's wife.

Scarsdale met with a cordial welcome from Mrs. Allingford, and was soon seated by her side chatting merrily.

"We should sympathise with each other," she said, laughing, "for I understand that we are both in ignorance of our destination."

"Indeed we should," he replied. "I dare say that at this moment your husband and my wife are gloating over their superior knowledge."

"Oh, well," she continued, "our time will come; and now tell me how you have endured the vicissitudes of the day."

"I think you and I have no cause for complaint," rejoined Scarsdale. "You see we understand our conventions; but I fear that our respective partners have not had such an easy time."

"I shouldn't think it would have worried Mrs. Scarsdale," returned the Englishwoman.

"Of course it didn't," said that lady's husband; "nothing ever worries her. But I think signing the register puzzled her a bit; she said it made her feel as if she was at an hotel."

"Robert enjoyed it thoroughly," said Mrs. Allingford.

"Had he no criticisms to offer?"

"None, except that one seemed to get a good deal more for one's money than in the States."

"The almighty dollar!" said Scarsdale, laughing, and added, as he looked at his watch: "I must be off, or your husband will be turning me out; our ten minutes are almost up."

Once on the platform, he paused aghast. The forward half of

the train had disappeared, and an engine was backing up in its place to couple on to the second part. Allingford was nowhere in sight.

"Where is the rest of the train?" cried Scarsdale, seizing an astonished guard.

"The forward division, sir?"

"Yes! yes! For Heaven's sake speak, man! Where is it?"

"That was the Exeter division. Went five minutes ago."

"But I thought we had ten minutes!"

"This division, yes, sir," replied the guard, indicating that portion of the train still in the station, "the forward part only five."

In this way, then, had Allingford unconsciously deceived him, and without doubt the American Consul had been carried off with his, Scarsdale's, wife. The awful discovery staggered him, but he controlled himself sufficiently to ask the destination of the section still in the station.

"Bournemouth, sir, Southampton first stop. Are you going? we are just off."

"No," replied Scarsdale. The guard waved his flag, the shrill whistle blew, and the train began to move. Then he thought of Mrs. Allingford; he could scarcely leave her. Besides, what was the use of remaining at Basingstoke, when he did not even know his own destination? He tore open the door of the carriage he had just left, and swung himself in as it swept past him.

CHAPTER IV IN WHICH LADY MELTON FEELS THAT HER AVERSION IS JUSTIFIED

From what has been said it may be imagined that Mrs. Scarsdale, *née* Vernon, was an excellent hand at light and amusing conversation; and so pleasantly did she receive the Consul, and so amusingly rally him on the events of the day, that he scarcely seemed to have been with her a minute, when a slight jolt caused him to look up and out, only to perceive the Basingstoke Station sliding rapidly past the windows. Allingford's first impulse was to dash from the carriage, a dangerous experiment when one remembers the rapidity with which a light English train gets under way. In this, however, he was forestalled by Mrs. Scarsdale, who clung to his coat-tails, declaring that he should not desert her; so that by the time he was able to free himself the train had attained such speed as to preclude any longer the question of escape. The sensations which Mr. Allingford and Mrs. Scarsdale experienced when they realised that they were being borne swiftly away, the one from his wife and the other from her husband, may be better imagined than described. The deserted bride threw herself into the farthest

corner of the carriage and began to laugh hysterically, while the Consul plunged his hands into his pockets and gave vent to a monosyllabic expletive, of which he meant every letter.

After the first moments of astonishment and stupefaction both somewhat recovered their senses, and mutual explanations and recriminations began forthwith.

"How has this dreadful thing happened?" demanded Mrs. Scarsdale, in a voice quavering with suppressed emotion.

"I'm afraid it's my fault," said Allingford ruefully. "The guard told me we had ten minutes."

"That was for your division of the train, stupid!" exclaimed the lady wrathfully.

"I didn't know that," explained the Consul, "and so I told your husband we had ten minutes, which probably accounts for his being left."

"Then I'll never, never forgive you," she cried, and burst into tears, murmuring between her sobs: "Poor, dear Harold! what will he do?"

"Do!" exclaimed the Consul, "I should think he had done enough, in all conscience. Why, confound him, he's gone off with my wife!"

"Don't you call my husband names!" sobbed Mrs. Scarsdale.

"Well, he certainly has enough of his own, that's a fact."

"If you were a man," retorted the disconsolate bride, "you would do something, instead of making stupid jokes about my poor Stanley. I'm a distressed American citizen – "

"No, you're not; you became a British subject when you married Scarsdale," corrected Allingford.

"Well, I won't be, so there! I tell you I'm an American woman in distress, and you are my Consul and you've got to help me."

"I'll help you with the greatest pleasure in the world. I'm quite as anxious to recover my wife as you can be to find your husband."

"Then what do you advise?" she asked.

"We are going somewhere at a rapid rate," he replied. "When we arrive, we will leave the train and return to Basingstoke as soon as possible. Now do you happen to know our next stop?"

"Yes: Salisbury."

"How long before we get there?"

"About three quarters of an hour."

"That will at least give us time," he said, "to consider what is best to be done. Have you a railway guide?"

"I think there is a South Western time-table in the pocket of dear Malcolm's coat," she said, indicating a garment on the seat beside her.

"Why don't you call him St. Hubart and be done with it?" queried Allingford, as he searched for and found the desired paper. "You've given him all his other names."

"I reserve that for important occasions," she replied; "it sounds so impressive."

Mabel Scarsdale, it will be noticed, was fast regaining her composure, now that a definite course of action had been

determined upon. But she could not help feeling depressed, for it must be admitted that it is disheartening to lose your husband before you have been married a day. What would he do, she wondered, when he found that the train had gone? Had he discovered its departure soon enough to warn Mrs. Allingford to leave her carriage? and if not, where had she gone, and had he accompanied her? The event certainly afforded ample grounds for speculation; but her reverie was interrupted by the Consul, who had been deeply immersed in the time-table.

"There is no train back to Basingstoke before ten to-night," he said, "so we must spend the evening in Salisbury and telegraph them to await our return."

"Possibly my husband may have chased the train and caught the rear carriage. I have seen people do that," she ventured.

"The guard's van, you mean," he explained. "In that case he is travelling down with us and will put in an appearance directly we reach Salisbury, though I don't think it's likely. However, there's nothing to worry about, and I must beg you not to do so, unless you wish to make me more miserable than I already am for my share in this deplorable blunder."

"You don't think they would follow us to Salisbury?"

"No; that is" – and he plunged into the intricacies of the time-table once more – "they couldn't; besides, they would receive our telegram before they could leave Basingstoke."

"Could they have gone off on the other train?"

"Impossible," he replied. "By Jove, they neither of them know

where they are bound for!"

"Quite true," she said, "they do not. We had tickets for Exeter; but as a joke I never let my husband see them."

"We were going to Bournemouth, and here are my tickets," he returned, holding them up, "but my wife doesn't know it."

"You think there is no question that they are waiting for us at Basingstoke?" she asked.

"Not a doubt of it; and so we have nothing to do but kill time till we can rejoin them, which won't be hard in your society," he replied.

"I'm sorry I can't be so polite," she returned, "but I want my husband, and if you talk to me much more I shall probably cry."

The Consul at this made a dive for an adjacent newspaper, in which he remained buried till the train slowed down for Salisbury.

"I suppose," he said apologetically, as they drew up at their destination, "that you won't object to my appropriating Scarsdale's coat and hat? I dare say he is sporting mine."

A tearful sniff was the only reply as he gathered up the various impedimenta with which the carriage was littered, and assisted his fair though doleful companion to alight. Returning a few moments later from the arduous duty of rescuing her luggage, which was, of course, labelled for Exeter, he found her still alone, there being no sign of Scarsdale in or out of the train, and no telegram for them from Basingstoke – a chance on which Allingford had counted considerably, though he had not

thought it wise to mention it. Indeed, the fact that no inquiry had been made for them puzzled and worried him greatly, for it seemed almost certain that were their deserted partners still at Basingstoke, their first action would have been to telegraph to the fugitives. However, he put the best face he could on the matter, assured Mrs. Scarsdale that everything must be all right, and despatched his telegram back to their point of separation. Under the most favourable circumstances they could not receive an answer under half an hour, and with this information the Consul was forced to return to the disconsolate bride.

"There is no use in loafing around here," he said. "Suppose we go and see the cathedral? It will be something to do, and may distract our thoughts."

"I don't think mine could well be more distracted than they are now," replied she; "besides, we might miss the telegram."

"Oh, I'll fix that," he returned; "I'll have it sent up after us. Come, you had better go. You can't sit and look at that pea-green engine for thirty minutes; it is enough to give you a fit of the blues."

"Well, just as you please," she said, and they started up into the town, and made their way to the cathedral.

It is not to the point of this narrative to discourse on the beauties of that structure; the finest shaft of Purbec marble it contains would prove cold consolation to either a bride or a bridegroom deserted on the wedding day. But the cool quiet of the great building seemed unconsciously to soothe their troubled

spirits, though when they each revisited the spot in after years they discovered that it was entirely new to them, and that they possessed not the faintest recollection of its appearance, within or without.

At last, after having consulted their watches for the hundredth time, they began to stroll down the great central aisle, towards the main entrance. Suddenly Mrs. Scarsdale clutched the Consul's arm, and pointed before her to where a messenger-boy, with a look of expectancy on his face and an envelope in his hand, stood framed in a Gothic doorway. Then they made a wild, scrambling rush down the church, the bride reaching the goal first, and snatching the telegram from its astonished bearer.

"For Mr. Allingford," he began, but she had already torn open the envelope and was devouring its contents.

For a moment the words seemed to swim before her eyes, then, as their meaning became clear to her, she gave a frightened gasp, dropped the message on the floor, sat down hard on the tomb of a crusader, and burst into tears.

Allingford gazed at her silently for a moment, and meditatively scratched his head; then he paid and dismissed the amazed boy, and finally picked up the crumpled bit of paper. It was from the station-master at Basingstoke, and read as follows:

"Parties mentioned left in second division for Southampton and South Coast Resorts. Destination not known."

It was incomprehensible, but he had expected it. If Mr.

Scarsdale had remained at Basingstoke he would certainly have telegraphed them from there at their first stop, Salisbury. Evidently he, too, had been carried away on the train; but where? It was some relief to know that his wife was not wholly alone, but he did not at all like the idea of her going off into space with another man, and the fact that he had done the same thing himself was no consolation. Then his mind reverted to Mrs. Scarsdale, who still wept on the tomb of the crusader. What in thunder was he going to do with her? To get her back to her aunt in London at that time of night was out of the question; but where else could he take her?

This point, however, was settled at once, and in an unexpected manner, by the lady herself. Drying her eyes, she remarked suddenly: "I'm a little fool!"

"Not at all," he replied; "your emotion is quite natural under the circumstances."

"But crying won't get us out of this awful predicament."

"Unfortunately no, or we should have arrived at a solution long ago."

"That," remarked the lady, "is merely another way of making a statement which you just now disputed. I *am* a little fool, and I mean to dry my eyes and attend strictly to business. Tell me exactly what this message implies."

"It means," said the Consul, "that it is impossible for you to rejoin your husband to-night."

Her lip quivered dangerously; but she controlled herself

sufficiently to exclaim: "But what are we to do?"

"Well," he replied, "I should advise remaining here. There is a good hotel."

"But we can't. Don't you see I must not remain – with you?" She spoke the last words with an effort.

"Yes," he rejoined. "It is awkward; but you can't spend the night in the streets; you must have somewhere to sleep."

"Let us go back to Basingstoke, then."

"I can't see that that would help matters," he said gloomily; "we would have to spend the night there just the same. Besides, I think it is going to rain." They were standing outside the church by this time. "No," he continued, "our best course, our only course, in fact, is to stay here to-night, return to Basingstoke to-morrow morning, and wait for them there. You may be sure they are having quite as bad a time as we are. If I only knew some one here –"

"Bravo!" she interrupted, clapping her hands, "I believe you have solved the problem. Look: do you see that carriage over there? What coat of arms has it? Quick! your eyes are better than mine."

In the gathering twilight he saw driving leisurely by, with coachman and footman on the box, a handsome barouche, on the panels of which a coat of arms was emblazoned.

"Well," he said, gazing hard at it, "there is a helmet with a plume, balanced on a stick of peppermint candy –"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, "the crest. Go on!"

"Down on the ground-storey," he continued, "there is a pink shield divided in quarters, with the same helmet in the north-east division, and a lot of silver ticket-punchers in the one below it."

"Spurs," she interjected.

"Well, perhaps they are," he admitted. "Then there are a couple of two-tailed blue lions swimming in a crimson lake – "

"The Melton arms!" she cried. "I looked them up in 'Burke's Peerage' when that old catawampus refused to come to our wedding. We will spend to-night with Lady Diana!"

"But I thought – " began the Consul, when his companion interrupted him, exclaiming:

"Chase that carriage as hard as you know how, and bring it here!"

Allingford felt that this was a time for action and not for speech. The days of his collegiate triumphs, when he had put his best foot foremost on the cinder-track, rose to his mind, and he fled across the green and into the gathering gloom, which had now swallowed up her ladyship's chariot, with a swiftness that caused his companion to murmur: "Well, he can sprint!"

Presently the equipage was seen returning with the heated and triumphant Consul inside. It drew up before her, and the footman alighted and approached questioningly.

"Is this Lady Melton's carriage?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"Then you may drive this gentleman and me to Melton Court."

"But, madam – "

"I am Mrs. Scarsdale, Lady Diana's great-niece," she said quietly. The footman touched his hat.

"Was her ladyship expecting you? We were sent to meet this next train, but – "

"No, we are here unexpectedly ourselves; but I dare say there will be room for all, as the carriage holds four."

"There will only be Lord Cowbray, madam, and his lordship may not arrive till the nine-thirty. If you would not mind driving to the station?"

"It is just what we wish," she replied, and calmly stepped into the carriage and seated herself by the Consul's side, who was so amazed at the turn affairs had taken that he remained speechless.

"Shall I see to your luggage, madam?" inquired the footman as they drew up opposite the waiting-room door.

"No," she replied, stepping out on the platform. "We will attend to it ourselves; it will only be necessary to take up our hand-bags for to-night."

Accompanied by the Consul she went in search of their belongings, and at her suggestion he took a Gladstone belonging to the absent Scarsdale, and a dressing-case which she designated as her own property.

"I was anxious to have a word alone with you," she said as they emerged once more on the platform, "and we can't talk on personal matters during the drive to the Court. You see my position is a little peculiar."

"Excuse me for asking the question," he replied, "but are your

relations with your husband's great-aunt quite cordial?"

"On the contrary, they are quite the reverse. She detests all Americans, and was very much put out at poor Harold for marrying me. Her refusal to be present at our wedding was almost an insult," she returned.

"That doesn't seem to promise a pleasant reception at Melton Court," he said.

"Far from it; but any port is acceptable in a storm, and she can hardly refuse us shelter. After all I've done nothing to be ashamed of in marrying my husband or being carried off with you."

"Oh, I'll trust you to hold your own with any dowager in the United Kingdom; but where do I come in?"

"You are my Consul, and under the circumstances my national protector; I can't do without you."

"I am not at all sure that her ladyship will see it in that light; but, as you say, it is better than nothing, and our position can't be worse than it is at present."

"Then it is agreed we stand by each other through thick and thin?"

"Exactly," he replied, and shook her extended hand. At this moment the train came in, and they returned to the carriage.

Lord Cowbray did not put in an appearance, and they were soon under way for Melton Court, which was some miles distant from the town. By the time they entered the grounds it was quite dark, and they could only see that the park was extensive, and that the Court seemed large and gloomy and might have dated

from the Elizabethan period.

On entering the central hall they at once saw evidences of a large house-party, whose presence did not tend to put them more at their ease, and Mrs. Scarsdale lost no time in sending a message to Lady Melton, to the effect that her great-niece had arrived unexpectedly and would much appreciate a few words with her in private.

They were shown into a little reception-room, and the footman returned shortly to say that her ladyship would be with them soon. After what seemed an endless time, but was in reality barely fifteen minutes, their hostess entered. She was a fine-looking woman of sixty or over, with a stern, hard face, and a set expression about her thin lips, that boded little good to offenders, whatever their age or sex. She looked her guests over through her gold eye-glasses, and, after waiting a moment for them to speak, said coldly:

"I think there is some mistake. I was told that my niece wished to see me."

"I said your great-niece," returned Mrs. Scarsdale.

"Oh, my great-niece. Well? I do not recognise you."

"It would be strange if you did, Lady Melton," returned the bride, "as you've never seen me. I am the wife of your great-nephew, Harold Stanley Malcolm St. Hubart Scarsdale."

"I do not see your husband present," said her ladyship, directing an icy glare at the unfortunate Consul.

"No," replied her niece, "I've lost him."

"Lost him!"

"Yes, at Basingstoke. He went to speak to a lady in another part of the train. I could make it clearer to you, I think, by saying that she was Sir Peter Steele's youngest daughter."

"I never thought of knowing the Steeles when I was in London," commented her hostess, "but St. Hubart was always liberal in his tastes." A remark which caused the Consul to flush with pent-up wrath.

"Oh, he didn't know her," interjected Mabel, hastening to correct the unfortunate turn which the conversation had taken. "She was this gentleman's wife."

Her ladyship bowed very, very slightly in the Consul's direction, to indicate that his affairs, matrimonial or otherwise, could have for her no possible interest.

"And that is the last we have heard of them," continued the bride, "except for a telegram from the station-master at Basingstoke, which says they went to Southampton –"

"Do I understand you to say," broke in their hostess, betraying the first sign of interest she had so far evinced, "that my nephew has eloped with –?"

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Scarsdale, "you do not in the least comprehend the true state of affairs," and she poured forth a voluble if disconnected account of their adventures.

"Pardon me," exclaimed the old lady when she had finished, "but what is all this rigmarole? A most surprising affair, I must say, and quite worthy of your nationality. I was averse to my

nephew's marrying you from the first; but I hardly expected to be justified on his wedding day."

"In that case," said Mrs. Scarsdale, "the sooner we leave your house the better."

"You will do nothing of the sort," replied her great-aunt. "Your coming to me is the only wise thing you have done. Of course you will remain here till your husband can be found. As for this person – " indicating Allingford.

"This *gentleman*," said his partner in misfortune, coming to his rescue, "is Mr. Robert Allingford, United States Consul at Christchurch. As my husband had gone off with his wife, I thought the least I could do was to take him with me."

"I can hardly see the necessity of that course," commented her hostess.

"Now that I have seen Mrs. Scarsdale in safe hands, I could not think of trespassing longer upon your hospitality," put in the Consul; but his companion intervened.

"I am not going to be deserted twice in a day!" she cried. "If you go, I go with you!"

"About that," said her ladyship frigidly, "there can be no question," and she rang the bell.

"You will conduct this lady and this gentleman," she continued to the footman who answered her summons, "to the green room and the tower room respectively." Then, turning to her unwilling guests, she added: "As my dinner-table is fully arranged for this evening, and my guests are now awaiting me, you will pardon

it if I have your dinner served in my private sitting-room. We will discuss your affairs at length to-morrow morning; but now I must bid you good-night," and with an inclination of her head she dismissed them from her presence.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A TRUNK IS SENT TO MELTON COURT

Scarcely had the sun risen the next morning when the Consul, after a sleepless night, stole downstairs and found his way out upon the terrace, for a quiet stroll and a breath of fresh, cool air. Moreover, he was in need of an uninterrupted hour in which to arrange his plans in such a manner as would most surely tend to effect the double reunion he so earnestly desired.

It seemed well-nigh impossible, in the small space of country which had probably been traversed by all parties, that they could lose each other for more than a few hours. To make the situation more clear to those who have never had the misfortune to suffer from the intricacies of English railway travel, the following diagram is appended. The triangle is isosceles, the sides being thirty-five miles long, the base twenty.

He reviewed his own adventures of yesterday afternoon. He had acted on what seemed to be the only sensible and reasonable plan to pursue; namely, to leave the train at its first stop, and return as soon as possible to the point of divergence. It seemed fair to assume that Mr. Scarsdale and Mrs. Allingford had done the same thing, and, such being the case, it was easy to imagine what their course of action had been. A glance at the time-

table told him that the first point at which they could leave their division of the train had been Southampton; from which place they could, almost immediately, catch an express back to the junction they had left, arriving there shortly after seven on the past evening.

His own course and that of Mrs. Scarsdale seemed clear; it was simply a return to Basingstoke immediately after breakfast, and rejoin their friends, who had been spending the night at that place.

It was possible that they had lost the returning express and remained in Southampton; but if they acted in a rational manner, they must eventually return to the junction. But supposing Mrs. Allingford and Mr. Scarsdale had not done the obvious thing; supposing that chance had intervened and upset their plans, as in his own case? He suddenly found himself face to face with the startling fact that not only were he and Mrs. Scarsdale not at Salisbury or Basingstoke, but that they were at present at the one place where his wife and Mrs. Scarsdale's husband would never think of looking for them – Melton Court.

Allingford jammed his hat hard on the back of his head, and set off at a brisk pace to Salisbury and the nearest telegraph station; arriving at his destination shortly before seven, to find that he had a good half-hour to wait before the operators arrived. The office was opened at last, however, and he lost no time in telegraphing to Basingstoke for information, and in a little while received an answer from the station-master at that point which

cheered him up considerably, though it was not quite as explicit as he could have wished. It read as follows:

"Scarsdale telegraphed last evening from Southampton, saying he had left train there with Mrs. Allingford and was returning at once to Basingstoke."

The Consul was pleased to find that his conjectures had been correct. He felt that a great weight had been lifted from his mind. Their missing partners had undoubtedly spent the night at Basingstoke and would soon consult the station-master at that point, who would doubtless show them the messages he had received. Allingford looked out a good train, telegraphed the hour of their arrival, and then, as his reception of the night before had not inclined him to trespass on Lady Melton's grudging hospitality more than was absolutely necessary, he had a leisurely breakfast at the hotel, and, engaging a fly, drove back to the Court, reaching there about half-past nine.

Mrs. Scarsdale had also passed a disturbed night, but, unlike her companion in misfortune, she did not venture out at unearthly hours in the morning. She was up, however, and saw him depart, which was in some ways a comfort, since it assured her that he was losing no time in continuing their quest.

At eight a maid arrived with warm water and a message from her ladyship that she wished Mrs. Scarsdale to breakfast with her in private at nine o'clock, and that she would be obliged if her great-niece would keep her room till that time. The bride was considerably piqued by this message and the distrust it implied,

but felt it would be wise to accede to the request, and sent word accordingly.

As she entered Lady Melton's boudoir an hour later, her hostess rose to receive her, kissing her coldly on the forehead, and saying:

"You will pardon my requesting you to keep your room; but your presence is not as yet known to my guests, and your appearance among them immediately after your marriage, without your husband, might cause unpleasant speculation and comment. Do you agree with me?"

"Quite," replied Mrs. Scarsdale. She had misjudged Lady Melton, she thought; but she disliked her nevertheless, and wished to be very guarded.

"Now," said that personage, "I want to hear the whole affair. No, I do not want you to tell it," as her guest opened her mouth to speak; "not in your own way, I mean. You would probably wander from the point, and my time is of importance. I will ask you questions, and you will be kind enough to answer them, as plainly and shortly as possible."

Mrs. Scarsdale bowed; she was so angry at the cool insolence that this statement implied that she did not feel she could trust herself to speak.

"Now we will begin," said her ladyship, as she proceeded to demolish a boiled egg. "What is your Christian name?"

"Mabel."

"Very well. Then I shall call you Mabel in future; it is

ridiculous to address you as Mrs. Scarsdale."

"I really don't see – " began that lady.

"Excuse me," interrupted her questioner, "I will make the comments when necessary. When were you married?"

"Yesterday afternoon at two-thirty o'clock."

"Where did you and your husband intend to pass last night?"

"At Exeter."

"Are you sure?"

"I ought to be. I bought the tickets."

"You bought the tickets! Is that customary in your country?"

"I am not here to discuss the customs of my country, Lady Melton. I bought the tickets because I chose to do so, and considered myself better fitted to arrange the trip than my husband."

"Really! I suppose that is the reason you selected the most roundabout way to reach Exeter. Your husband could have told you that you should have taken another railway, the Great Western."

"My husband," said Mrs. Scarsdale stiffly, "did not know our destination."

"What!"

"I say that my husband did not know our destination."

Her ladyship surveyed her for a moment in shocked and silent disapproval, and then remarked:

"I think I understood you to say that you travelled together as far as Basingstoke?"

"Yes, and there St. Hubart met a friend."

"This consular person?"

"Mr. Allingford? Yes. He was also married yesterday, and came to our carriage to congratulate me."

"And my nephew went to speak to Mrs. Allingford."

"Exactly. And the first thing we knew the train was moving."

"Go on."

"That is just what we did, though Mr. Allingford tried to leave the carriage and return to his wife."

"It would have been better had he never left her."

"But I restrained him."

"How did you restrain him?"

"By his coat-tails."

"Excuse me. Do I understand you to say that you forcibly detained him?"

"I'm sorry if you are shocked; it was all I could catch hold of."

"I shall reserve my criticism of these very astonishing performances, Mabel; but permit me to say that you have much to learn concerning the manners and customs of English society."

"Then," said Mrs. Scarsdale, ignoring this last remark, "we came to Salisbury."

"And telegraphed to Basingstoke for information."

"Exactly. But they could tell us nothing; so when I saw your carriage – "

"How did you know it was mine?"

"I looked out your coat of arms in 'Burke.'"

Her ladyship smiled grimly. Perhaps something might be made of this fair barbarian – in time, a great deal of time; but still this knowledge of the peerage sounded hopeful, and it was with a little less severity in her voice that she demanded:

"And what do you mean to do now?"

"Go back to Basingstoke this morning."

"Alone?"

"No, with Mr. Allingford."

"Do you expect to find your husband there?"

"I should think he would naturally return as soon as possible to where he lost me."

"I don't know," said her ladyship. "Was Mrs. Allingford pretty?"

"If you are going to adopt that tack, Lady Melton, the sooner we part the better," said her visitor angrily.

"We do not 'adopt tacks' in England," returned her ladyship calmly; "and as I consider myself responsible for your actions while you are under my roof, I shall not allow you to go to Basingstoke, or anywhere else, with a person who, whatever his official position, is totally unknown to me."

"You don't mean to keep me here against my will!"

"I mean to send you to your relations, wherever they are, under the charge of my butler – a most respectable married man – provided the journey can be accomplished between now and nightfall."

"Well, it can't," replied her grand-niece triumphantly. "Aunt

Eliza left for Paris this morning, and all my other relations are in Chicago."

Lady Melton was, however, a woman of decision, and not to be easily baffled.

"Then I will send you to your mother-in-law, Lady Scarsdale, I suppose she has returned to 'The Towers'?"

"I believe so. But I do not intend to go there without my husband; it would be ignominious."

"Perhaps you can suggest a better plan," said her ladyship coldly.

"Well, if you refuse to let me go to Basingstoke – " began the bride.

"I do. Proceed."

"Then Mr. Allingford might go for me, and tell St. Hubart where I am. I know he is waiting for me there, but he would never think of my being here – Excuse me, I mean – " she stammered, blushing, for she saw she had made a slip.

"We will not discuss your meaning," said her hostess, "but your plan seems feasible and proper. You may receive the consular person in my private sitting-room and arrange matters at once."

Her niece turned to go, but she stopped her, saying:

"One word more. I do not think it necessary for your friend Mr. Allingford to return with my nephew. Pray make this clear to him."

After having been dismissed from her hostess' presence, Mrs.

Scarsdale lost no time in sending for the Consul, who had just returned, and proceeded to work off on that unfortunate gentleman the rage engendered by her recent interview.

"I'm inclined to think," he said when she had finished, "that in this instance the catawampus is right. There is no use of your gallivanting over the country after your husband; he ought to come to you. I'll run down to Basingstoke at once, send him back, and with Mrs. Allingford go on my way rejoicing. There is no need of my returning, and I guess her ladyship won't cry her eyes out if I don't."

"You haven't yet told me the result of your excursion this morning," she said, hoping to divert the conversation from so obvious a truth.

"This," he replied, holding up the telegram he had just received from the station-master at Basingstoke.

After reading the message, Mrs. Scarsdale was most anxious that he should lose no time in starting, and with mutual expressions of friendship, and boundless thanks from the deserted bride, they parted: he for the junction, she for a further interview with her great-aunt.

When her ladyship learned that Scarsdale had left Southampton for Basingstoke, and was doubtless now in that place, she advised his wife to remain in seclusion till the members of the house-party, which luckily was breaking up that day, had departed; and retired herself to prepare a few remarks with which to welcome her errant great-nephew. Later in the day,

however, she so far relented towards his wife as to suggest that she take a stroll on the terrace while the few remaining guests were indulging in a post-prandial siesta.

It was from this coign of vantage that she saw approaching the worn and drooping figure of Mr. Allingford. She rushed to meet him, and demanded, without even giving him time to get his breath:

"Where is my husband?"

"I don't know," he gasped.

"Or your wife?"

"Or my wife."

"Aren't they in Basingstoke?"

"No, and haven't been there. I've turned that confounded town inside out, and catechised every one about the station, from the divisional superintendent to the charwoman. They did not come last night, nor arrive this morning. Since leaving Southampton, if they did leave it, they have entirely disappeared."

"Why do you say, 'if they did leave' Southampton?"

"Because no one saw them go. I have learned by endless telegraphing that they alighted at that point, told a porter they had been carried past their destination, and wished to return at once to Basingstoke. He indicated their train, they disappeared in the crowd – and that's all."

"Haven't they telegraphed again to Basingstoke?"

"Not since last night."

"Or to Salisbury?"

"No. I inquired on the chance, but no message had come."

"It is horrible!" she exclaimed. "I'm the most miserable woman on earth!"

"Don't cry," he begged despairingly.

"No," she said, "I won't. Do you think it would be any good to telegraph to Aunt Eliza and Lady Scarsdale?"

"I have already done so. Your Aunt Eliza has left for Paris. She wouldn't have done that if she had heard about this; and it gave Lady Scarsdale a fit – the telegram I mean – but she didn't know anything."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I have telegraphed to my Vice-Consul at Christchurch, asking for news of Scarsdale, and telling him to forward anything that had come for me. They might have *written* there, you know, to save talk in the office; but I haven't as yet had a reply."

"I must consult Lady Melton; the situation is too dreadful for words. Suppose they have had an accident; suppose – " she faltered.

"Nonsense!" he rejoined, "bad news always travels quickly; don't make yourself uneasy on that score. They've got side-tracked in some out-of-the-way place, just as we have. I'll go to Southampton to-morrow and work up the trail. Now you run off and consult the catawampus."

When her ladyship had heard the whole story, she summed up as follows:

"As your friend has seen fit to return, you may tell him his chamber will be again made ready for to-night, and you will both dine in my sitting-room as before. To-morrow I shall send you home to Lady Scarsdale."

"But – "

"There is nothing more to be said on the subject. I have made up my mind." And having pronounced sentence, she left her distracted great-niece to her own reflections.

It was a very doleful couple who sat down to dinner that evening in Lady Melton's private room.

"It is ridiculous!" said Mrs. Scarsdale. "We are being treated like naughty children. I feel as if I were about to be whipped and put to bed. Sent home with the butler, indeed! I'd just like to see her ladyship try to do it!"

"How are you going to prevent her?" asked the Consul.

"I'm not a child, and I won't be treated as one! If I am to be sent home in disgrace, you will have to come with me."

"Well, I like that! You seem to forget I've lost my wife. My first duty is to find her."

"Your first duty is to me. If you go to Southampton, I go with you."

"I'm afraid there'll be an awful row with her ladyship."

"Let there be, then; I don't care!"

"I really think," he expostulated, "that you had better stay here one day more. I'll get you a reprieve from the custody of the butler, and have a try at Southampton myself. There is a cross-

line from here, and it won't take any time to run over. I've tracked horse-thieves in Kentucky when I was sheriff, and I guess I can find a bridegroom where it's all open country as it is round here."

At this moment a servant knocked and entered, saying:

"Please, madam, her ladyship's orders is that you are to be ready at seven to-morrow morning, to start with Mr. Bright, the butler, for 'The Towers.'"

"I – !" began Mrs. Scarsdale, rising in wrath and indignation; but before she could further complicate matters by a direct refusal, the footman had turned to Allingford, and, handing him a telegram, had left the room. Forgetful of all else, she rushed to the Consul's side as with nervous fingers he tore it open. What joyful news might it not contain! One look at his face, however, blasted all her hopes. Horror, consternation, and surprise were depicted thereon as he read the despatch. Something dreadful must have happened.

"Tell me the worst!" she cried. "Is it Harold?"

"It is the last straw," he replied.

"Is he dead?"

"I wish he was."

"You wish my husband dead?"

"Oh, confound your husband!"

"Mr. Allingford – !"

"No, no, I don't mean that. I'm not responsible for what I'm saying," he replied, and groaned aloud. But his companion was not to be put off.

"Is that telegram from my husband?"

"No."

"From my mother-in-law?"

"No."

"From Aunt Eliza?"

"No."

"From the station-master at Basingstoke?"

"Guess again."

"From your Vice-Consul?"

"Yes."

"Has he heard anything of our lost ones?"

"It has nothing to do with that."

"Then what is the matter? What does it all mean?"

"It means," replied the Consul, "that I've got to leave here by the first train."

"Explain yourself," she demanded.

"I'll try," he replied, mopping his brow. "You see, an American applied to me to lend him some money, a few days ago, and put up as collateral an elephant."

"Harold told me the story. I thought it very amusing."

"You won't when I've finished. The elephant arrived day before yesterday at Southampton, and, as I had informed the steamship company that I was the temporary owner of the beast, they forwarded it to my consulate at Christchurch."

"How does that affect us?"

"Affect us!" he cried. "Do you remember what I telegraphed

my Vice-Consul?"

"Yes, almost word for word," she answered. "You asked for news of the fugitives, and, on the chance of their writing to Christchurch, told him to forward here anything that might have come for you."

"Exactly," shrieked the Consul; "and the blamed fool has forwarded the elephant!"

"What! Here? To Melton Court?" she exclaimed, aghast.

"That is what I said. The beast is on the way now, and ought to be here bright and early to-morrow morning."

"How awful! What will you do?"

"Get out," he replied laconically.

"And leave me?"

"I don't know about you, but I mean to leave the elephant. I don't wish to start a bigger circus than I have on hand already."

"But would it be quite right to our hostess?" expostulated her niece.

"If you've any conscientious scruples on the subject, you can stay and tend the beast. I'm leaving by the first train."

"But it's your elephant."

"Of course it is, and I've a right to do what I choose with it. I mean to leave it to Lady Melton, in payment for my board and lodging. After the way she's treated me I don't want to owe her anything."

"Really, Mr. Allingford – " began his companion.

"Now look here," he retorted; "would you want an elephant

tagging you round on your honeymoon?"

"Well, no, I don't think I should," she replied, laughing.

"Besides," he continued, "how am I to prosecute a search for our missing halves with a Noah's ark in tow?"

"That does put the matter in a different light," she admitted.

"You bet it does!" he replied. "As for her ladyship, she can do what she pleases with my slight token of regard. Give it to the poor of the parish, if she likes; I don't ask her to keep it."

"But what is to become of me?"

"Oh, you are to be sent home with the butler early to-morrow morning."

"I won't go!"

"Then join me."

"But supposing we don't find my husband to-morrow – "

"Then I'll take you down to my consulate at Christchurch for the night. I have plenty of friends there with whom you can stay."

"That settles it," she replied.

So it was that they stole away from the Court in the grey dawn of the next morning, footed it to Salisbury, recovered their baggage, and boarded the early train for Southampton. As it moved out of the station they passed a long line of box cars on a siding, from one of which the angry scream of an elephant resounded.

"Just in time," said the Consul with a sigh of relief. "I wish her ladyship joy of my little remembrance."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH MR. SCARSDALE CHANGES HIS NAME

Mr. Scarsdale entered Mrs. Allingford's compartment with so great an impetus, when he swung himself into her carriage at Basingstoke, that he completely lost his balance, and shot past her on all fours, to land in a heap on the floor. A second later the guard banged the door, and the train was off.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the Consul's wife, "and where is my husband?"

"Excuse me," gasped Scarsdale, picking himself up from the floor, "but I couldn't leave you."

"So it appears," she replied coldly. "But you have not answered my question, and –" as the train began to move rapidly, "it is not possible that we are getting under way!"

"Yes," he said gloomily, "we are off to Southampton."

"Answer me instantly: where is my husband?" she demanded.

"Gone to Exeter, I suppose, with my wife."

"What do you mean?"

"That he was carried off in the first division of the train, which left five minutes ago."

"But I thought we stopped ten minutes."

"So *you* did; *we* stopped only five. When I left you just now,

I saw that the forward half of this train had disappeared, and the guard told me it had gone to Exeter, and that this portion was just leaving for Southampton. I thought it better to stay with you than to let you go by yourself; so as the carriage was moving, and it was impossible to get you out, I jumped in."

"Thank you," she said simply; and for a moment there was silence between them while the train rattled over the points, and, reaching the outskirts of the town, began to increase its speed. The little Englishwoman did not, however, emulate her fair American partner in distress, who was at this moment indulging in hysterics in the other train; she had been too well trained to betray her feelings before a man whom she knew but slightly, even over the loss of a husband; so, after remaining quiet for a little, she controlled herself sufficiently to say, very calmly:

"I do not see that we can either of us blame ourselves for what has happened; we must try and make the best of it, and rejoin your wife and my husband as soon as possible."

Plucky little woman! thought Scarsdale to himself; to Mrs. Allingford he said:

"I am glad you see things in so sensible a light. You must let me help you in every way that is in my power."

"You say our first stop is Southampton?" she asked.

"Yes, we reach there in less than an hour. They slip some carriages at Winchester, but the train doesn't stop," he replied.

"Then I think we should alight at Southampton," she said, "and return at once to Basingstoke."

"That would certainly be our best course. When you lose a man in a crowd, it is much better to wait at the point where you lost him till he finds you than to hunt for him yourself, as you will both miss each other."

"Then you propose to let them find us."

"That is my idea. Of course I'll telegraph to the station-master at Basingstoke that we will return there, so that if they wire for information concerning us he can give it them."

"Where do you think they have gone?"

"If we either of us knew our destination it would be far easier," he said, laughing. "I hope this will be a lesson to my wife."

"But surely the train must stop before it reaches Exeter."

"Undoubtedly; but as I have no time-table, I can't say where. Perhaps your husband has one in his overcoat. If you will permit me," and he proceeded to examine the garment in question.

No time-table was forthcoming, however, and they were forced to resign themselves to waiting till they reached Southampton.

Mrs. Allingford bore up bravely, and even tried to make conversation; but it proved to be a dreary ride, and when they drew up at their destination they were both exceedingly thankful.

"Is there a train back to Basingstoke soon?" asked Scarsdale of the first railway porter he saw.

"Yes, sir, over there on the left. Express leaves in three or four minutes," replied that individual, as he hurried away with somebody else's baggage.

"I'll take you over," said Scarsdale.

"No," replied his companion, "I can find it. You attend to the telegram and my luggage."

He dashed off accordingly, and when he returned they both entered the train on the left.

"I've sent the telegram," he said, "and I have also discovered your destination."

"How?" she inquired.

"By the labels on the luggage. It was marked for Bournemouth, and a jolly hard time I had to induce them to take it out of the van and send it back with us."

"It seems to me," she said after a little, "that we've been waiting here more than four minutes. I trust we are not in the wrong train. One has just gone out."

"Hi! guard!" called Scarsdale from the window. "Is this the express for Basingstoke?"

"No, sir," replied the official. "It was the train beyond you, which has just left. Sorry if you've made a mistake, sir."

"Confound it, yes!" cried Scarsdale. "Where does this train go?"

"Stopping train for Winchester."

"Can we go on to Basingstoke?"

"Not by this train, sir."

"But from Winchester?"

"There is sure to be a train this evening, sir."

"It has been a chapter of accidents," he said, explaining it to

Mrs. Allingford, "but we had better go to Winchester, I think; it is on the way anyhow."

"Yes," she assented, "and then get on to Basingstoke as fast as we can, and not be discouraged."

"Quite right," he replied, and entered into a description of Southampton docks and the varied cargoes that were received there, in the hope of distracting her mind.

"Oh, look!" she cried, as, once more started on their travels, they came in sight of the shipping, "see what they are loading on that truck! I do believe it is an elephant!"

After what seemed an interminable journey, they at length arrived at Winchester, and as soon as Scarsdale had seen Mrs. Allingford established in the ladies' waiting-room, he hastened to ascertain their chances of getting to Basingstoke that night. On his return he wore a very long face, which his companion was not slow to interpret.

"Are there no trains?" she exclaimed, in evident dismay.

"There is one," he replied, "but we should not reach our destination till very late, almost midnight in fact, and we cannot tell that we should find your husband even then. I think our best course would be to remain here."

"Oh, but that is impossible."

"No, there is a very fair hotel."

"I didn't mean that. But can't you see the position in which I am placed?"

He did see, and he knew that what he proposed seemed to

her almost an impossibility; but as they were now situated he considered that circumstances altered cases.

"I am sure, Mrs. Allingford," he said, "that your good sense, which has carried you through so much this afternoon, will show you the necessity of acting as I have suggested. You must not forget that you are now a married woman, and can do things which before were not permissible."

"Still," she contended, "to go to a public hotel with a gentleman who is a comparative stranger, and pass the night there, seems to me not the thing at all; and if we were recognised by anybody – " She paused, hardly knowing how to complete her sentence.

"Then go alone. There are other hotels; I will put up somewhere else," he replied.

"No, no, I couldn't be left alone; I've never been alone before in my life. That would be worse than all else. You see, if you were only related to me it would be so different."

"I am quite willing to pass myself off as any relation you please, for the sake of appearances."

"But that would be deceitful."

"I think the exigencies of the case will excuse that; besides, it is my own affair, not yours. Will you have me as a brother for one night only?" he asked, laughing.

"But I have no brother," she replied.

"Then as your husband's brother," he suggested; "that would be better still, as he is an American and not known here."

"Do you really think it best?"

"To save you annoyance, I think it is a pardonable deception.

What is his name?"

"Richard. But I don't know much about him."

"Then we will consider that that is settled," he said cheerfully, and, without giving her time to argue the matter, summoned a fly, which presently deposited them bag and baggage at the hotel door. To make assurance doubly sure, he hastened to sign their names in the visitors' book:

"Mrs. Robert Allingford, Christchurch, England.

"Mr. Richard Allingford, U.S.A."

"Can you give my sister and me good rooms for to-night?" he asked the landlady.

"Yes, sir, two nice rooms just opposite each other."

He said that that would do very well, and they were soon installed.

Once in her apartment, Mrs. Allingford indulged in a good cry, while Scarsdale strolled out before dinner to have a smoke and think it over. He did not see much further use in telegraphing just at that moment. Later it would, perhaps, be well to send a message to Basingstoke, saying that they were detained at Winchester and would come on next morning; for he had quickly learned that Mrs. Scarsdale and Mr. Allingford would be able to leave the train at Salisbury, and justly surmised that they had done so.

Presently, having finished his cigar, he returned to the hotel to

find Mrs. Allingford ready for dinner, and much refreshed by her tears and subsequent ablutions. They neither of them ate much, and after the fish they gave up any attempt to make conversation as worse than useless, and finished the repast in silence.

"I'm afraid," she said, as she folded her napkin, "that you've found me very poor company."

"I'm nothing to boast of myself," he replied.

"I hope they are not as miserable as we are," she added, as they rose to leave the table. "I haven't been able to eat a thing."

Scarsdale did not reply; he had a gloomy suspicion that his wife was making a very good meal somewhere. Not that he doubted her love; but he did not believe her devotion included loss of appetite.

"Don't you think they are miserable?" she queried, uneasy at his silence.

"Not so miserable as we are," he said. "They are both Americans, you see, and Americans don't take things seriously as a rule."

"What do you suppose they are doing?" was her next question.

"Seated swinging their feet over the edge of Salisbury platform, finishing my five-pound box of American candy," he said.

She tried to be amused, and even forced a little laugh; but it was a dismal failure, and, realising it, she at once excused herself and retired to her room for the night, leaving Scarsdale to pass the evening as best he could. He approved of her circumspection,

but it was beastly dull, and, as he sat smoking in the winter garden which the hotel boasted, he felt that he should soon become insufferably bored.

He presently, therefore, overcame his natural reserve sufficiently to respond to the advances of the only person in the room who seemed inclined to be sociable. The stranger was a florid, shaggy-bearded man of a distinctively American type, a person Scarsdale would naturally have avoided under ordinary circumstances; but to-night he felt the need of human society, no matter whose, and in a few moments they had drifted into conversation. At first the subjects under discussion were harmless enough, relating mainly to Winchester and neighbouring points of interest, concerning which Scarsdale was forced to confess himself ignorant, as it was his first visit to the place. Before long, however, they began to touch on more dangerous ground, and he saw that, even with a casual acquaintance of this sort, he must be guarded if he was to remain consistent in his role of brother to the deserted bride.

"Were you ever in America?" was the first question which startled him.

He replied in the affirmative, as he could honestly do, having been taken by his father to Canada when but a lad. But the stranger was not satisfied, and began, after the manner of his nation, a series of leading questions, which kept Scarsdale busy in trying to assimilate with some regard to truth the character he had chosen. It was at this moment that a waiter came to him

and asked in a perfectly audible voice if he was Mr. Richard Allingford. Scarsdale was forced to admit the fact, and to reply to a message sent, as the waiter took unnecessary pains to explain, "By your sister, sir."

"Excuse me," interjected his companion, "but may I ask if your sister's name is Mrs. Robert Allingford?"

The Englishman would have given worlds to deny the fact, but in the presence of the waiter, who still lingered, and in the face of the evidence in the visitors' book, only one course was open to him, and he replied reluctantly in the affirmative.

"Wife of the United States Consul at Christchurch?"

"Yes," said Scarsdale.

Now he could once more tell the truth, he felt happier; but he had a premonition that all was not well, and heartily wished he had never encouraged this American, who might know more than was convenient.

"Why, Dick!" said that personage, leaning across the little table that separated them, and grasping both his hands – "Why, Dick! Don't you know me?"

If a thunderbolt had shattered the floor at the Englishman's feet he could not have been more dumfounded. The one seemingly impossible thing had come to pass. In all this great world, with every chance against it, fate had ordained that the little provincial city in which he had planned to play, for one night only, another man's part, should also contain one of that man's friends, and they two had met. He was so staggered, as the

possibilities contingent on this mischance crowded through his brain, that he could only stammer out:

"You have the advantage of me."

"Well, I don't much wonder," continued his new-found friend. "If I have changed as much in fifteen years as you have, it isn't strange you didn't recognise me. Lord! I'd never have known you if you hadn't told me who you were."

"You must do me as great a favour," said Scarsdale, regaining a little of his self-composure. If so long a time had elapsed since their last meeting, he felt that things were not so bad after all, and that he could reasonably hope to bluff it out.

"Well," said the other, "the boys used to call me Faro Charlie; now you remember."

The Englishman tried to look as if he did, and the American proceeded to further elucidate matters by saying:

"Why, surely you ain't forgotten me as was your pal out to Red Dog, the time you was prospecting for copper and struck gold?"

"No, no," said Scarsdale. "Of course I remember you now." He couldn't be supposed to have forgotten such an event, he felt; but the whole affair was most unfortunate.

"I guess you've settled down and become pious, from the looks of you," continued Faro Charlie; "but you'll have a drink for old times' sake just the same."

"No, thanks, you must excuse me," he replied, feeling that he must drop this unwelcome friend as soon as possible. But the friend had no intention of being dropped, and contented himself

by saying:

"Rats!" and ordering two whiskies.

"Why, I've known the day," he continued, "when Slippery Dick – we used to call you Slippery Dick, you remember, 'cause you could cheat worse at poker than any man in the camp." Scarsdale writhed. "Well, as I was saying, you'd have shot a man then who refused to drink with you."

The Englishman sat aghast. Little had he thought he was impersonating a card-sharper and a wholesale murderer. The whisky came and he drank it, feeling that he needed a bracer.

"Now," said Faro Charlie, "I want to hear all about what you've been doing, first and last. Tending copper-mines, I heered, out to Michigan."

This, the Englishman felt, was going too far. It was bad enough to have to impersonate such a fellow as "Slippery Dick," but to endow him with a fictitious history that was at all comparable with Faro Charlie's account of his earlier years required too great an effort of imagination. And the fact that a quiet little man, who was sitting near by, edged up his chair and seemed deeply interested in the conversation, did not tend to put him more at his ease. No wonder, he thought, the Consul did not talk much about his brother. He therefore hastened to change the subject.

"Have you seen much of the Indians lately?" he ventured; it seemed such a safe topic.

"Thinking of that little squaw you was so chummy with down to Injun Reservation?" queried his friend, punching him jovially

in the ribs. "You knew, didn't you, that they'd had her up for horse-stealing to Fort Smith? Reckon as they'd a hung her if she hadn't been a woman. She was a limb! Guess you had your hands full when you tackled her."

Scarsdale decided his choice of a subject had not been fortunate, and begged Faro Charlie to have some more whisky.

"Sure," replied that individual. "Drink with you all night."

"I'm afraid you can't do that," replied Scarsdale, hastening to rid himself of his unwelcome friend. "I have some important business to attend to this evening."

"I wish you weren't in such a rush. Come back and we'll paint the town, eh?"

Scarsdale thought it extremely unlikely, and shaking hands fled to the street with a sigh of relief; for he had had a very bad quarter of an hour. What cursed luck that he should have run across this American horror! He must avoid him at all costs tomorrow morning.

In his hurry he had not noticed that the quiet little man had left the winter garden with him. His one thought was to get away. He determined to send that telegram to Basingstoke at once, and go to bed before any one else recognised him: one of Slippery Dick's friends was enough.

But unkind fate had not yet done with him, and a new and more terrible surprise was in store for the unfortunate bridegroom. He had scarcely gone a dozen yards from the hotel entrance, when a voice said just beside him:

"Excuse me, Mr. Richard Allingford, but may I have a few words with you?"

Scarsdale turned, and finding himself face to face with the quiet little man, who had seemed so interested in his conversation of a few moments ago, said:

"I seem to be in great demand to-night. Why do you wish to see me? I don't know you."

"No," said the man who stood beside him. "No, you do not know me, Mr. Richard Allingford; but you will."

He was a quiet, unpretending little man; but there was something about his dress and bearing, and the snap with which he shut his jaw at the end of a sentence, an air of decision, in short, which caused the Englishman to feel that he would do well to conciliate this stranger, whoever he might be, so he said shortly:

"What do you want with me? Speak quickly; I'm in a hurry."

"I couldn't help overhearing some of your conversation just now at the hotel, and so I took the liberty of following you to ask you a question."

"Yes?" said Scarsdale interrogatively.

"If I mistake not you are the brother of the United States Consul at Christchurch, and came over to his wedding."

"Yes," he admitted; for he did not see how he could well deny to one man what he had just confessed to another.

"You have been in England about ten days, I think?"

"As long as that, certainly."

"May I ask what ship you came on?"

"By what right do you ask me these questions?"

"You will see presently."

"But suppose I refuse to answer them?"

The unknown shrugged his shoulders, and said quietly:

"Now wasn't it the *Paris*?"

"Yes," said Scarsdale, who remembered with joy having seen that fact chronicled in a London paper.

"I suppose you have never been in Winchester before?"

"Never in my life."

"Not last week?"

"Look here!" said Scarsdale angrily, "what the devil are you driving at?"

"It is a pity you should have such a good memory for past and not for recent events," said the quiet little man, "a great pity."

"I tell you I have never been here!"

"Didn't dine at the Lion's Head last Wednesday, for instance?"

"No, I did not, and I've had enough of this insolence!"

"So have I," said the little man, blowing a little whistle. "So have I, and therefore I arrest you, Richard Allingford, in the Queen's name."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH MR. SCARSDALE REAPS ANOTHER'S WHIRLWIND

Scarsdale was absolutely staggered by the word "arrest." Arrest! What nonsense! Who was this man who talked of arresting *him*, Harold Scarsdale, peaceably engaged in trying to find his wife and proceed on his honeymoon? The first sensations of surprise and incredulity were quickly followed, however, by a realisation of the horrible situation in which his own stupidity had placed him. In the eyes of the law he was not Harold Scarsdale, but Richard Allingford, and he shuddered to think with what crime he might be charged; for, from what he had learned in the last half-hour, he could not doubt that he was posing as one of the most abandoned characters that had ever visited the town of Winchester.

A person who consorted with horse-thieves, cheated at cards, and thought nothing of shooting friends who were not thirsty, would surely be satisfied with no ordinary crime. Of what was he accused? He hardly dared to ask. And how was he to get out of this dreadful dilemma? His reflections, however, were cut short by the arrival of a burly policeman, in answer to his captor's whistle. The little man at once addressed the newcomer, quite ignoring Scarsdale.

"Here's your man Allingford; not a doubt of it," he said.

"Got your warrant?" inquired the policeman, laying a detaining hand on the prisoner's shoulder.

"Here it is," replied the first speaker, producing a paper, which the officer glanced at and returned, saying at the same time to Scarsdale:

"Now, then, come along o' me, and don't make no resistance if you knows what's good for you."

"I do not intend to offer any resistance," replied that gentleman, and turning to the little man he asked: "By what right do you arrest me, and on what charge?"

"I'm Private Detective Smithers," replied his captor, "and this," again producing the paper he had already shown to the policeman, "is my warrant. You know the charge well enough."

"I'm entirely ignorant of it!" cried Scarsdale hotly.

"Of course," said the detective. "They always are," and he winked at the officer.

"I tell you I don't know anything about it!" reiterated the unfortunate bridegroom.

"I must caution you," remarked the policeman, "that anything you says may be used against you as evidence."

"I demand to know why I am arrested. I have a right to do so."

"Tell him, Bill," said the detective, "and stop his row."

The officer, thus admonished, nodded his head, and replied shortly:

"Two charges: 'sault and battery on the landlord of the Lion's

Head, and disturbing the peace on last Wednesday night."

"I deny the charge!" cried Scarsdale.

"Of course you do," replied the policeman; "I suppose you would. Now you've had your say, are you coming along peaceable, or are you not?"

"Certainly I am," replied the prisoner, and they started up the street, followed by a small crowd, which had already collected.

"I must warn you," continued Scarsdale, when they were fairly under way, "that you are making a mistake. I am not the man you take me for."

"I suppose you'll deny your name is Richard Allingford next," said the detective, laughing.

"I do deny it."

"Well I'm blessed!" remarked his captor.

The policeman simply said: "Come on, that's too thin!" and jerked him roughly by the arm.

Scarsdale quickened his pace, saying angrily:

"If you'd only give a man a chance to explain!"

"You'll have chance enough, when you come up to-morrow, to explain to the court," replied the officer, "and a pretty bill of damages into the bargain."

"Oh, if it's only a fine," remarked the prisoner, feeling much relieved, "I'll pay it and welcome, rather than have a row."

"Maybe you won't have the option," replied one of his captors; while the other added cheerfully: "What you needs is thirty days, and I 'opes you'll get it."

At the police court Scarsdale did not help his case by insisting on giving his right name, and denying all knowledge of the charge. His statements were entered against him, he was relieved of his watch, purse, and jewellery, and introduced to the cold comforts of the lock-up.

On being asked if he wished to communicate with any one, he replied that the next morning would be quite time enough; for he knew that Mrs. Allingford could give him little help in his present predicament, and he did not wish to disturb her night's rest to no purpose.

It can be well imagined that the accommodations of an English provincial prison are not luxurious; but the room was clean, and fortune favoured him in that he had only two companions, both of whom were stupid drunk, and went to sleep very peaceably on the floor.

Scarsdale improvised a bed on a settee, and, using his coat as a pillow, passed a fairly comfortable night. Luckily he was of a somewhat phlegmatic temperament, and withal very tired after the day's exertions; so, in spite of the misfortunes which were crowding about him, he was able to resign himself to the inevitable, and eventually to drop off to sleep.

Early next morning, however, he arranged to have a note delivered to Mrs. Allingford at the hotel, in which he informed that lady of his unfortunate predicament, begging her not to distress herself on his account; and assuring her that in all probability it was merely a matter of a trifling fine, and that he

should be at liberty to rejoin her within a few hours.

He felt very little of what he wrote; but as long as there was a chance of things coming out right, he wished to spare her all possible worry.

His ready money procured him a better breakfast than he could have hoped for, and by nine o'clock, when the court opened, he was refreshed and ready for whatever might befall. His two companions in misfortune preceded him for trial, but their cases were soon disposed of, and Harold Scarsdale, *alias* Richard Allingford, was put into the dock.

The court-room consisted of a plainly furnished apartment, containing a raised platform at one end, on which were placed the desk and armchair of the police magistrate, while in front were several rows of benches for the accommodation of the public: but as the cases were of no general interest, Scarsdale was relieved to see that the attendance was meagre. Mrs. Allingford was present, however, looking very white and distressed, but managing to muster up a smile to greet him as he entered.

The proceedings were short and to the point. The police constable, on being called and given the oath, kissed the book and deposed that at about a quarter to nine on the previous evening, while on his accustomed beat, he had been summoned by Private Detective Smithers to aid in arresting the prisoner, who had professed ignorance of the charge, the truth of which he afterwards denied, and who persisted in asserting that he was not Richard Allingford.

Private Detective Smithers now took the stand and stated the case from his point of view; which was, in short, that the conversation he had overheard at the hotel between the prisoner and another person here present, and the statement which the prisoner made to him personally, proved that he was without doubt the Richard Allingford mentioned in the indictment. In conclusion he begged that the person styling himself Faro Charlie should be summoned to corroborate his testimony. Faro Charlie was accordingly called and placed in the dock, and after the usual preliminaries the magistrate examined him as follows:

"What is your name?"

"Faro Charlie."

"Any other name?"

"Smith."

"Very well, Charles Smith; are you a citizen of the United States?"

"I be."

"Of what occupation?"

"Miner."

"Do you recognise the prisoner as the person whom you met at the George last evening?"

"I do."

"Can you swear that he is Richard Allingford?"

"No."

Scarsdale's heart leaped at that "no"; salvation was at hand after all.

The magistrate continued:

"Do you believe this person to be Richard Allingford?"

"Yes, on the whole I think I do." The prisoner's heart sank.

"But," continued the witness, "I can't be sure. Fifteen years is a long time. I wouldn't have known him if he hadn't owned up to his name. He might be playing me for a sucker."

"In other words, you think the prisoner to be Richard Allingford, but are unwilling to swear to his identity?"

"That's the stuff," replied Faro Charlie. "I swore as a man was my uncle, three years ago at 'Frisco, and he put a bullet into me next day, 'cause I lost him the case. After which I ain't swearing against a pal," and he left the stand.

The case now proceeded, and the detective related how on Wednesday, the 16th of October, the prisoner, Richard Allingford, in company with other lawless characters, had dined at the Lion's Head, and, during a dispute with the landlord concerning the quality of the wine, had thrown that personage out of his own second-storey window; telling his wife, who protested against such actions, to put her husband in the bill, which they left without settling. Then they proceeded to paint the town of Winchester a lurid crimson, breaking windows, beating a policeman who interfered, and raiding a night coffee-stall in the process.

This recital of wrong and outrage being finished, the magistrate addressed the prisoner as follows:

"What is your name?"

"Harold Stanley Malcolm St. Hubart Scarsdale."

Some one in the audience murmured, "O Lor'!"

"You refuse to admit that your name is Richard Allingford?"
continued the justice.

"I have just given you my name."

"Are you an American?"

"No, I am an Englishman."

"Where do you live?"

"'The Towers,' Sussex."

The audience again voiced its sentiments; this time to the effect that the prisoner was "a 'owling swell"; but order was restored and the case once more proceeded.

"What is your profession?"

"I am a clerk in the War Office."

"Does not that interfere with the management of your estate?"
asked his interlocutor, to whom the last two statements savoured of contradiction.

"I have just succeeded to the estate, through the death of an elder brother."

"Ah, I see. Now in regard to last evening. Do you admit meeting at the George the person who calls himself Charles Smith?"

"Yes."

"Did not you represent yourself to him as being Richard Allingford?"

"Yes."

This reply caused a sensation in the court.

"I suppose," said the magistrate, "that you realise that this is a serious admission."

"It is the truth."

"Perhaps you can explain it to the satisfaction of the court."

"I assumed the name," said Scarsdale with an effort, "to screen from possible annoyance a lady who was under my protection. With the permission of the court, however, I should prefer not to go into this matter further, as it has no direct bearing on the charge. My action was foolish, and I have been punished for it."

"You certainly chose an unfortunate alias," commented the magistrate drily, and, much to the prisoner's relief, turned to another phase of the case.

"What are you doing in Winchester?"

"I am on my honeymoon. I was married yesterday."

A titter of laughter ran round the court-room; but the magistrate frowned, and continued:

"I suppose that is the reason why you registered under an assumed name, and are travelling with somebody else's wife?"

There was more laughter, for the justice had a local reputation as a wit. Scarsdale boiled inwardly, but held his peace; while his judge, who seemed to feel that he had strayed a little from the subject in hand, after a moment's silence asked shortly:

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty to these charges?"

"Not guilty!"

"Do you wish this matter settled here or in a superior court?"

"I desire that it be settled here, provided I am given an opportunity to prove my identity."

"You will be given every reasonable opportunity. What do you wish?"

"I wish to ask first by whom these charges are preferred."

"The charge of assault and battery has been brought by the landlord of the Lion's Head."

"I infer that the landlord served Richard Allingford in person on the night in question, and would be likely to know him if he saw him."

The magistrate conferred with the detective, and replied that such was the case.

"If the question is not out of order," resumed the prisoner, "may I ask if the landlord of the Lion's Head is a reputable witness, and one whose testimony might be relied on?"

"I think you may trust yourself in his hands," replied the justice, who had seen all along whither the case was tending.

"Then," said Scarsdale, "I shall be satisfied to rest my case on his identification."

"That is quite a proper request," replied the magistrate. "Is the landlord of the Lion's Head present?"

At this a dapper little man jumped up in the audience, and explained that he was the landlord's physician, and that his patient, though convalescent, was still disabled by his injuries and unable to attend court.

On inquiry being made as to when he could put in an

appearance, the physician replied that he thought the landlord could come the next day.

The magistrate therefore consulted for a moment with the detective, and then said to the prisoner:

"Your case is remanded for trial until to-morrow."

Scarsdale held up his hand in token that he wished to speak.

"Well," said the magistrate, "what else?"

"If I can, by the time this court meets to-morrow, produce reputable witnesses from London to prove my identity," asked the prisoner, "will their evidence be admitted?"

"If they can identify themselves as such to the satisfaction of the court, yes."

The magistrate thereupon dismissed the case, and Scarsdale was removed from the court-room.

He felt he had come off singularly well, and, except for the annoyance and delay would have little further trouble. What he most desired was an interview with Mrs. Allingford; but what with a change in his quarters, owing to the deferment of the trial, and the difficulty of getting word to her, it was the middle of the afternoon before this was accomplished.

The unfortunate little woman seemed completely broken down by this fresh disaster, and it was some time before she could control herself sufficiently to talk calmly with him.

"I shall never, never forgive myself," she sobbed. "It is all my fault that you have incurred this disgrace. I can never look your wife in the face again."

"Nonsense!" he said, trying to cheer her up. "There is no disgrace in being arrested for what somebody else has done; and as for its being your fault, why, it was I who proposed to pass myself off as your husband's brother."

"But I allowed it, only I did not know anything about my brother-in-law, except that he existed; his being in England is a complete surprise to me." A remark which caused Scarsdale to be thankful that he had said nothing to her about that scene at the club when the Consul heard of Dick's arrival. "He must be very wicked. I'm so sorry. But we won't talk about him now; we will talk about you. What can I do to retrieve myself?" she continued.

"Let us consider your own affairs first," he replied. "I wasn't able to send a telegram to Basingstoke last night; I was arrested on my way to the office."

"I sent one, though, this morning, right after the trial."

"I didn't know that you knew where to go," he said.

"I didn't," she returned; "but that queer American person, who wouldn't swear to your identity, sent it for me. He is very odd, but I'm sure he has a good heart. He was so distressed over the whole affair, and offered to be of any assistance he could."

"Oh!" said Scarsdale. He was not pre-possessed in Faro Charlie's favour.

"So I think," she went on, "that if they are at Basingstoke, they will be here in a few hours. I told them all about your arrest and where I was staying."

"So far so good. Allingford can identify me even to the

satisfaction of this magistrate, I think. But it is just as well to have two strings to one's bow, so I have another plan to suggest; but first let me hear if you have done anything else."

"No; but I think I shall telegraph to my mother. I can't spend another night here alone."

"Why don't you wait and see if your husband does not turn up? I hate to give our affairs more publicity than is necessary," he suggested.

"Would you prefer me to do so?"

"Yes, very much; if you don't mind."

"Then I will. I think, after my share in this unfortunate business, you ought to have the first consideration. Now tell me your plan."

"I propose that we telegraph to your husband's best man, Jack Carrington, asking him to come to Winchester this evening. He can identify me, and identify himself also, for he has a brother who is an officer in one of the regiments stationed here."

"Just the thing!" she cried. "I'll send it at once."

"No," replied Scarsdale. "You write it and I'll send it." He did not wish any more of his plans to be revealed to Faro Charlie.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH A SERIOUS CHARGE IS LAID AT THE CONSUL'S DOOR

Jack Carrington, Esquire, Gentleman, sat in his snug little sitting-room, in one of the side streets of Mayfair, shortly before seven in the evening, feeling uncommonly blue. He was, without doubt, in a most unfortunate position. Born and bred a gentleman; educated to do nothing, yet debarred by lack of family influence from the two professions he might properly have entered, the army and the diplomatic corps; with not quite enough money to support his position as a bachelor, and no hopes of ever having any more, the outlook, matrimonially at least, was anything but encouraging, and there was a lady – with whose existence this narrative has no concern – who, had fortune smiled, might now be Mrs. Carrington: a possibility which had brought our quondam best man almost to the point of determining, according to those false standards which are happily fast passing away from English society, to be no longer a *gentleman*, but to go into trade.

Such, then, was his condition when the door-bell rang, and a moment later a card was brought to him bearing the name of Lady Scarsdale. He looked at it, scarcely believing his eyes. How came it that she should call on him at an hour so strikingly

unconventional? It was therefore with no little bewilderment that he gave orders to have her shown in.

When her ladyship, whom he had never seen before, entered his parlour, he found himself face to face with a strikingly handsome woman of middle age, dressed in semi-mourning. She accepted his outstretched hand, held it a second, and, taking the seat he offered, said, with just a glance in the direction of a demure little woman who followed her into the room:

"Miss Wilkins."

Carrington bowed, and Miss Wilkins, maid or attendant, whichever she might be, retired to the remote end of the room, and promptly immersed herself in the only volume within reach, a French novel which Jack felt sure she had never seen before, and would not be likely to peruse to any great extent.

"You will naturally be surprised at my presence here this evening," said Lady Scarsdale.

Her host bowed and smiled, to show that pleasure and gratification were mingled; indeed, until she further declared her position he hardly knew how he ought to feel.

Her ladyship continued:

"My object in coming is unusual; it is, in short, to request your aid and assistance in a very extraordinary and delicate matter."

Jack bowed again, and his visitor proceeded:

"You will excuse me if I seem agitated" – she certainly did seem very much so, if red eyes and a quivering lip meant anything – "but I have scarcely recovered from the shock occasioned

by the arrival of a telegram received this morning from a Mr. Allingford, at whose marriage, I think, you assisted."

"I was his best man."

"So I understand."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"That you shall hear. Do you know my son, Mr. Scarsdale?"

"Only slightly."

"You may be aware that he was married yesterday." Jack nodded, and she continued: "To a Miss Vernon, an American. You know her, I believe?"

"Quite well," replied her host. "She is a most charming woman."

"Now this Mr. Allingford telegraphs me," resumed his visitor, "from my aunt Lady Melton's country seat, Melton Court, that he is staying there with my son's wife, who was Miss Vernon."

"Staying there with Allingford! At Melton Court!" gasped Jack, to whom this seemed the most improbable combination of circumstances. "But where is her husband?"

"I regret to say," replied her ladyship, "that, as a result of the two couples meeting each other at Basingstoke, they in some way became separated and carried off in different trains; so that my daughter-in-law and Mr. Allingford are now at my aunt's country place, near Salisbury, while my son and Mrs. Allingford have gone off together somewhere on the South Coast, and no trace can be found of them."

"But how did it happen?"

"The whole affair seems to have been the result of some deplorable blunder or accident; but in any event it is most distressing, and I came up at once to London, thinking you might be able to help me. But I see from your surprise that you have heard nothing from either party."

"Not a word. But I am quite at your service."

"Thanks. You may not know that, actuated by a spirit which I cannot admire, my son's wife and your friend each insisted on arranging the details of their wedding trips, and keeping the matter a profound secret, so that neither Mrs. Allingford nor my son knew their destination."

"Yes, I have heard something of it; but I infer that you have not honoured me by this visit without the hope that I may be able to aid you. Pray tell me how I can be of service."

My chief desire in calling on you, Mr. Carrington, was to learn if you had had any news of my son or his wife; but, of course, on my journey to town I have been thinking of various expedients, and though I hesitate to ask so great a favour from one I hardly know, you could, I think, be of great assistance to me.

"With pleasure. Do you wish me to telegraph to Allingford, or go in search of your son?"

"Neither. But I should be very grateful to you if you would go for me to Melton Court; I have not myself sufficient strength for the journey to-night; it is already late and I have no one to send. But I feel that my daughter-in-law is in an anomalous and probably unpleasant position; so, as I knew you to be a

friend of both parties, I thought that perhaps you would be good enough to represent me, and see what could be done towards the solution of this unfortunate problem. My son's best man left for the Continent immediately after the ceremony, or I would have gone to him instead."

"There is nothing I should like better than to serve you," replied Jack, "but, to speak frankly, I have not the honour of knowing Lady Melton."

"If you will permit me to use your desk, I will give you a line of introduction."

Carrington bowed his consent.

"Now," she said, giving him the note, "when can you leave?"

"At once," he replied, "by the first train."

"You will, of course, act as you think best," she continued. "I am staying at the Berkeley for to-night, and if Mabel's husband has not rejoined her before you arrive, you had better bring her to me there to-morrow. As you are going on my behalf you must, of course, let me bear all expenses of the trip."

On this ground her ladyship was firm in spite of Carrington's protestations, and they finally parted, with many expressions of gratitude, on a mutual and highly satisfactory understanding.

As Jack employed a valet only on state occasions, he was, after a hurried dinner, deep in his preparations for immediate departure, when, about half-past eight, Mrs. Allingford's telegram from Winchester arrived, which it is hardly necessary to say startled him considerably. The news that Scarsdale was

under arrest for the crime of another person, and the fact that it lay in his power to free him, seemed to prove without doubt that his first duty was to go to Winchester; but he had promised Lady Scarsdale to go to Melton Court, and it was impossible to do both that night. He was uncertain how to act, and what his ultimate decision would have been it is difficult to say, had not an outside influence decided matters for him. Another caller was announced.

"I'm not at home. Can't see anybody," said Carrington.

"That's not true, young man, and you've got to see me," replied a voice, and, as the door opened, to his astonishment Aunt Eliza advanced into the middle of the room, which was littered with his toilet articles.

"Why, Miss Cogbill!" he exclaimed, rising to greet her, "I thought you were in Paris."

"So I should be if I hadn't been stopped at Calais by a telegram from that good-for-nothing Consul of yours."

"Allingford. Then you know where they are?"

"Yes, and of all the fools – !"

"I've also heard from Scarsdale and Mrs. Allingford."

"You have! Where are they?"

"Winchester."

"Winchester! What are they doing there?"

"He's been arrested."

"Arrested!"

"Yes. Sit down and I'll tell you about it." Which he proceeded

to do, and also about Lady Scarsdale's visit.

"Just so," commented Aunt Eliza when he had finished. "Now what do you propose doing next?"

"I suppose the proper thing would be to put the two couples in communication with each other," suggested Jack.

"Well, I'm not so sure," she said. "You and I are the only ones who know all the facts, and we must not act in a hurry. Now there's Allingford and Mabel down at Melton Court. They'll keep till to-morrow, I guess. It would just spoil her night's rest to know that her husband was in jail at Winchester, and send her over to him by the first train to-morrow morning, like as not, to weep on his neck and complicate the course of justice. Anyway, I don't think the two couples had better meet till we are present to soothe their ruffled feelings; for, after the mess that the Consul's brother has got them into, I dare say that, left to themselves, the Scarsdales and Allingfords wouldn't be real cordial to each other. But I see you are packing up. Now where are you going?"

"I was going down to Salisbury, at Lady Scarsdale's request."

"You're needed elsewhere. You go right down to Winchester this evening, so as you can be there when the court opens first thing to-morrow morning, to identify my good-for-nothing nephew, liberate him, and send him and Mrs. Allingford over to Melton Court as soon as you can. I'll be there before you to break the news to Mabel."

"Well, you see," he said, "I've promised her ladyship."

"Never mind that; your business is to fish these young people

out of their troubles. I'll drive at once to Lady Scarsdale's hotel, and tell her of your change of plans, and go down myself by the first train to-morrow morning to Salisbury."

"Then," he said, closing his valise with a snap, "I shall leave at once for Winchester."

"Good boy!" said Aunt Eliza. "It's too bad they spoiled you by making you a gentleman; you have a first-class head for business."

"It is just what I've been thinking myself," he said ruefully.

"Have you?" cried the old lady, her face lighting up with genuine interest. "I'm glad to hear it. You just put this matter through successfully, and maybe it will be worth more to you than your expenses. Now I must be off, and so must you."

"Very well. I'll put up at the George," he said, as he helped her into a hansom.

"Right you are!" she cried, and signalled her driver to go on.

As Carrington found that he would not reach Winchester till late, he telegraphed Mrs. Allingford that he would see her the next morning, and that he had received news of the whereabouts of her husband and Scarsdale's wife, who were all right and would join them on the morrow.

On his arrival he went straight to the hotel that Mrs. Allingford had designated in her telegram, to find that that lady had retired for the night, leaving, however, a note for him which contained full instructions, and stated in addition that she had received his telegram, for which she was profoundly grateful, and that he must

not hesitate to wake her if, by so doing, he could cause her to rejoin her husband one instant sooner.

As it was by this time close upon midnight, Carrington decided to let matters rest as they were till morning; especially as he had before he slept to hunt up his brother at the barracks, and so insure his attendance at court the next day. This was easily arranged; but the two men had much to talk over, and it was nearly daybreak when Jack set out to return to the hotel.

The shortest way back was by a cross cut through the mysterious darkness of the cathedral close, within which he heard the voices of two men in heated dispute, the tone of the one shrill with rage, while those of the other proclaimed that he had been drinking.

Carrington would have passed without noticing, so intent was he on his own affairs, had not a name which one of them pronounced arrested his attention and caused him to stop.

"You call Robert Allingford a thief!" came the thick tones of the intoxicated man.

"I say he stole it!" cried the shrill voice of the other.

"Call my brother a thief!" reiterated the first speaker. "He's Consul – gentleman. Gentlemen don't steal elephants."

"I say he stole it! Right away that day! Didn't wait for me to redeem it."

"You dare to call my brother thief!" The voice grew menacing.

"Twenty pounds he gave me – only one hundred dollars – for an elephant. I say he's a thief – !"

Here the shrill voice died away in a gulp, and there was a sound of blows and scuffling.

Carrington forced his way through the hedge, crying:

"Hold on! What is this about?"

At the sound of his voice the owner of elephants exclaimed. "The bobbies!" and, disengaging himself from the other, fled down the road; while his companion, who had started to follow him, was detained by Jack, who recognised his captive as none other than Richard Allingford.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Allingford, "it's Mr. Carrington. Delighted to see you, I'm sure. Correcting that fellow. Says brother Robert stole elephant." His arrest had somewhat sobered him.

"Of course," said Carrington, "he didn't steal the elephant."

"Where is he?"

"Your brother?"

"Yes."

"At Melton Court, near Salisbury; but you must not go there."

"Yes, I will," replied Slippery Dick, waxing pugnacious, "Take the elephant fellow along, too – make him eat his words. Call my brother a thief, will he?"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said his captor. "You're wanted here by the police."

"What!"

"Yes. For assault and battery, and disturbing the peace. They have arrested another man, a Mr. Scarsdale, by mistake in your

place."

"I don't know anything about it. Never been here before to-night," protested the unregenerate one.

"Well, you must come along with me and give yourself up, or – ." But Carrington never finished the sentence; for at that moment he struck the ground very hard, and by the time he realised that Slippery Dick had tripped him, that personage had disappeared into the darkness, thus justifying his sobriquet.

Jack picked himself up and struggled through the hedge; but no one was in sight, and the dull, distant sound of flying feet seemed to indicate that the Consul's brother was seeking fresh fields and pastures new with uncommon celerity.

CHAPTER IX IN WHICH THE CONSUL AND MRS. SCARSDALE EMULATE THE KING OF FRANCE AND TWENTY THOUSAND OF HIS COMPATRIOTS

Another day was dawning, a day that was destined to be most arduous, eventful, and important in the lives of all those with whom this narrative has to deal. Yet, at this hour in the morning, Carrington, sitting shivering on his bedside; Lady Melton, listening in her chamber for the departing footsteps of the faithful Bright; Aunt Eliza, drinking an early cup of coffee in preparation for a long day's work; the Consul and Mrs. Scarsdale, journeying to Southampton; Slippery Dick, pouncing on the sometime owner of elephants at a way-side alehouse; Scarsdale, pacing his prison cell; Mrs. Allingford, waiting, 'twixt hope and fear, for news of her husband; and the elephant, shrieking in his box-stall – these, one and all, entered regretfully upon this day fraught with so many complications.

Carrington had decided, as he wended his way home to the hotel after his somewhat startling encounter with the Consul's

unregenerate brother, that he was in no wise bound to report the matter to the authorities. His mission was to extricate Mr. Scarsdale from unjust imprisonment, not to incriminate any one else; and he foresaw that any attempt on his part to interfere, as an avenger of justice, might entail subsequent attendance at the local police court whenever the true culprit fell into the hands of the law.

When Jack had thus determined on his course of action, he resigned himself peacefully to slumber, of which he stood much in need; but no sooner, apparently, had his head touched the pillow than he was awakened by a knocking at his chamber door. In reply to his sleepy inquiries, he was informed that Mrs. Allingford was up and in the ladies' drawing-room, and would much appreciate it if she could see him as soon as possible.

Carrington replied that he would be happy to wait on her in a few minutes, as soon as he was dressed, in fact, and cursed himself heartily for having been fool enough to be any one's best man. Half-past six! It was inhuman to call him up at such a time. He had not had three hours' sleep. He wished himself at Melton Court more than ever. There, at least, they rose at decent hours.

As he entered the hotel drawing-room, a few minutes later, in a somewhat calmer frame of mind, due to a bath and a cup of coffee, Mrs. Allingford rose to meet him, took both his hands in hers, and, holding them tightly, stood for a moment with her upturned eyes looking fixedly into his. He would never have known her for the happy bride of two short days ago; she seemed

more like a widow, years older, and with all the joy of her youth crushed out by trouble.

"Words cannot express what your coming means to me. It is the kindest thing you've ever done," she said simply; but her tone and manner told him of her gratitude and relief.

"It is very little to do," he replied, feeling, all at once, that he had been a brute not to have seen her the night before.

"My husband! Oh, tell me about my husband!" she exclaimed, dropping all restraint.

"What a child she was, in spite of her wedding-ring!" he thought; but he felt very sorry for her, and answered gently:

"I blame myself for not telling you sooner. He is safe and well."

"Thank God!" she murmured.

"And at present at Melton Court, the country place of Lady Melton, Mr. Scarsdale's great-aunt." And then he told her such of her husband's adventures as he knew.

"When is the first train to Salisbury?" she cried, interrupting the recital.

"I dare say there is an early morning train," he returned; "but I should suggest your waiting for the one at nine-thirty, as then Mr. Scarsdale can accompany you."

"But he is in prison."

"Yes, I know; but he won't be very long."

"You are sure they will release him?"

"There's not a doubt of it. I have arranged all that."

"Now tell me more about my husband, everything you know."

Poor Bob! if he has suffered as I have, he must indeed be wretched."

Jack was morally sure that the Consul had done nothing of the kind, but he forbore to say so. Not that he doubted for a moment that Allingford loved his wife ardently; but he knew him to be a somewhat easy-going personage, who, when he could not have things as he wanted them, resigned himself to making the best of things as they were. From what he knew of Mrs. Scarsdale, moreover, he thought it safe to conclude that she had resigned herself to the exigencies of the case, and that both of them looked on the whole affair as a practical joke played upon them by Fate, of which they could clearly perceive the humorous side. He therefore turned the conversation by recounting all he knew, even to the minutest circumstance, of her husband's adventures; and she, in her turn, poured into his ear her tale of woe in Winchester.

"I can't understand," he said, at the conclusion of her narrative, "why Allingford did not receive the telegram you sent to Basingstoke yesterday."

"As I think I told you," she replied, "that strange person, Faro Charlie, offered to send it for me, and as I had no change I gave him a five-pound note."

"Oh!" said Carrington, "perhaps that solves the mystery. Did your friend bring you back the change?"

"N – o," admitted Mrs. Allingford; "that is, not yet."

"I'm afraid you will never hear from your five-pound note, and that Allingford never received his telegram from Winchester,"

commented Carrington; "but it has disposed of Faro Charlie as a witness, and perhaps that was worth the money."

"Do you really think he meant to take it?" she asked in a shocked tone.

"I'm sure of it," he replied, "and time will prove the correctness of my theory." And time did.

They breakfasted together, and, at Carrington's suggestion, all the baggage was sent to the station, in order that they might have every chance of making the train. Jack's brother joined them about half-past eight, and the three proceeded to the court, where a few words from that officer to the magistrate, with whom he was personally acquainted, were sufficient to bring Scarsdale's case first on the docket.

The landlord of the Lion's Head appeared, a mass of bandages, and groaning dolefully to excite the sympathy of the court; but he testified without hesitation that the prisoner, though somewhat resembling Richard Allingford, was not he; and it did not need Carrington's identification to make Scarsdale a free man. Then there were mutual congratulations, and a hurried drive to the station, where they just succeeded in catching the train; and, almost before he knew it, Jack was standing alone upon the platform, while his two friends were speeding towards the goal of all their hopes, *viâ* Southampton and Salisbury.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Scarsdale to the Consul, as their train drew out of Salisbury in the first flush of the sunrise on the morning which saw Mr. Scarsdale's liberation from durance vile

– "I suppose you realise that you have exiled me from the home of my ancestors."

"How so?" asked the Consul.

"Why, you don't imagine that I shall ever dare to show my face at Melton Court again. Just picture to yourself her ladyship and your elephant! She will never forgive us, and will cut poor Harold off with a shilling."

"That won't hurt him much, from all I've heard of her ladyship's finances," he replied.

"I think," she resumed, "that I ought to be very angry with you; but I can't help laughing, it is so absurd. A bull in a china-shop would be tame compared with an elephant at Melton Court. What do you think she will do with the beast?"

"Pasture it on the front lawn to keep away objectionable relatives," retorted the Consul. "But, seriously speaking, have you any definite plan of campaign?"

"Certainly not. What do you suppose I carry you round for, if it is not to plan campaigns?"

"Which you generally alter. You will please remember that the visit to Melton Court was entirely owing to you."

"Quite, and I shall probably upset this one; but proceed."

"Well, in the first place, as soon as we reach Southampton I think we had better have a good breakfast."

"That is no news. You are a man; therefore you eat. Go on."

"Do you object?"

"Not at all. I expected it; I'll even eat with you."

"Well said. After this necessary duty, I propose to go to the station and thoroughly investigate the matter of the arrival and departure of my wife and your husband."

"If they were at Basingstoke we should have heard from them before this," she said; "and even if they were not, they should have telegraphed."

"Very probably they did," he replied; "but, as you ought to know, there is nothing more obliging and more generally dense than an English minor official. I dare say that the key to the whole mystery is at this moment reposing, neatly done up in red tape, at the office of that disgusting little junction. But here we are at Southampton. Now for breakfast; and then the American Sherlock Holmes will sift this matter to the bottom." And the Consul, in excellent spirits, assisted her to alight.

Indeed, now that the elephant had been left behind, he felt that, actually as well as metaphorically, a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Evidently," remarked Allingford, as they were finishing a breakfast in one of the cosy principal hotels – "evidently the loss of your husband has not included the loss of your appetite."

"Of course it hasn't," replied Mrs. Scarsdale. "Why shouldn't I eat a good breakfast? I have no use for conventions which make one do disagreeable things just because one happens to feel miserable."

"Do you feel very miserable? I thought you seemed rather cheerful on the whole," he commented.

"Well, you are not to think anything so unpleasant or personal. I'm utterly wretched; and if you don't believe it I won't eat a mouthful."

"I'm sure," he returned, "that your husband would be much put out if he knew you contemplated doing anything so foolish."

"Do you know," she said, "that I'm beginning to have serious doubts that I ever had a husband? Do you think he's a myth, and that you and I will have to go through life together in an endless pursuit of what doesn't exist?"

"Good Lord, I hope not!" he exclaimed.

"That is very uncomplimentary to me," she retorted.

"In the face of that remark," he replied, pushing back his chair, "I am silent."

"Do you know," said his companion after a moment, as she folded her napkin, "that the keen sense of humour with which we Americans are endowed saves a large percentage of us from going mad or committing suicide?"

"Are you thinking of doing either?" he asked anxiously.

"I am thinking," she replied, "that we have had two exceedingly amusing days, and I am almost sorry they are over."

"Don't you want to find your husband?" he exclaimed.

"Of course I do; but it has been a sort of breathing-space before settling down to the seriousness of married life, and that elephant episode was funny. I think it was worth two days of any husband; don't you?"

"I don't know," returned the Consul, somewhat ruefully. "I'd

just as lief that Scarsdale had had the beast."

"Oh, I wouldn't!" she cried. "He would have spoiled all the fun. He'd have done some stupid, rational thing. Donated it to the 'Zoo' in London, I should think; wasted the elephant, in fact. It took the spirit of American humour to play your colossal, practical joke. I wonder if it has arrived at the Court yet. I can fancy it sticking its head, trunk and all, through the great window in Lady Melton's dining-room."

"She called me a consular person," remarked that official stiffly.

"Hence the elephant," laughed his fair companion. "Cause and effect. But, joking apart, there is a pitiful side to our adventure. When I think of those two matter-of-fact, serious British things, your better half and my – my husband, and of what a miserable time they have been having, unrelieved by any spark of humour, it almost makes me cry."

"Hold on!" cried Allingford, "You are just as bad as your great-aunt. She calls me a consular person, and you call my wife a British thing! I wish I had another elephant."

"I beg your pardon, I do really," she replied. "I classed my husband in the same category. But don't you agree with me that it's sad? I'm sure your poor wife has cried her eyes out; and as for my husband, I doubt if he's eaten anything, and I'm certain he's worn his most unbecoming clothes."

"You are wrong there," interrupted Allingford; "he packed all the worst specimens, and I rescued them at Salisbury. I tried them

on yesterday, and there wasn't a suit I'd have had the face to wear in public."

"There, run along and turn the station upside down; you've talked enough," she said, laughing, and drove him playfully out of the room.

It was about half-past nine that the Consul meditatively mopped his head, as he reached the top step of the hotel porch. He was heated by his exertions, but exceedingly complacent. He had interviewed sixteen porters, five guards, the station agent, three char-women, four policemen, and the barmaid – the latter twice, once on business and once on pleasure; and he had discovered from the thirtieth individual, and after twenty-nine failures and a drink, the simple fact that those he sought had gone to Winchester. He did not think he could have faced Mrs. Scarsdale if he had failed. As it was, he returned triumphant, and, as he approached their private parlour, he mentally pictured in advance the scene which would await him: her radiant smile, her voluble expression of thanks, their joyful journey to Winchester; in short, success. He pushed open the door, and this is what really happened: an angry woman with a flushed, tear-stained face rushed across the room, shoved a newspaper at him, and cried:

"You brute!"

The Consul dropped into the nearest chair. He looked at the infuriated Mrs. Scarsdale, he looked at the crumpled newspaper, he heard the last echo of that opprobrious monosyllable, and he

said:

"Well I'm jiggered!"

Then, recollecting his news, he continued:

"Oh, I forgot. I've found out where they have gone; it's Winchester."

"Is that all you've got to tell me?" she cried. "All, in the face of this?" And she again shoved the newspaper towards him. He looked to where her finger pointed. He was hopelessly bewildered, and wondered if her native humour had inopportunately failed her and she had gone mad.

"Read!" she commanded.

His wandering eye followed the direction of her finger, and he read slowly, with open mouth, a short account of the arrest and partial trial at Winchester of one Richard Allingford, who claimed to be Harold Scarsdale.

"Tell me," she thundered, "is that my husband?"

"Well," he said, slowly, "I guess it is," and he re-read the last sentence of the paragraph in the newspaper:

"The prisoner insisted that he was Harold Scarsdale, and could prove his identity. He was accompanied by a woman who claimed to be Mrs. Robert Allingford, wife of the well-known United States Consul at Christchurch. The prisoner was remanded till this morning."

"Have you a brother?"

"Yes."

"Has he ever been arrested?"

"Arrested! Why, I've spent most of my time for the past twenty years in bailing him out."

"But why has my husband taken his name?" she demanded.

"That is a matter you'll have to settle with Scarsdale; and if you look as you do now, I'm real sorry for him," he replied.

"You don't care a bit!" she cried.

"Oh, yes I do; but I want you to see it from its humorous side," he answered.

At this remark Mrs. Scarsdale burst into a flood of tears, and Allingford gave a sigh of relief, and, strolling to the window, was soon lost in admiration of the view.

Suddenly a voice said, in the sweetness of its accustomed tones:

"Why were you so pleased when I began to cry?" And Mrs. Scarsdale, calm and composed, stood beside him.

"Hard storm is a good thing to clear the atmosphere after a thunder-shower," replied the Consul laconically.

"I was real mad with you," she admitted.

"Great Scott! don't you suppose I knew that?" he cried.

They both laughed, and peace was restored.

"Do you really think it is poor Harold?"

"I suppose he doesn't get called St. Hubart when he's in 'quod'?"

"Be sensible and answer my question. Is it my husband or your brother who is on trial at Winchester?"

"I don't know," he replied.

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"Go and see."

"When is the next train?"

The Consul pulled out his watch.

"In twelve and a half minutes," he said. "I've paid the hotel bill. Here, hold on! You turn to the left for the elevator!" But Mrs. Scarsdale was half-way downstairs on her way to the station.

An hour later, as the Consul and his fair companion emerged at the station at Winchester, the first person they saw was Carrington.

"We've been found at last!" cried the Consul, advancing towards Jack with outstretched hand, exclaiming: "Well, Columbus Carrington, if ever I get lost again, I'll telegraph you first thing."

In a minute questions and answers were flying between them. Where had they been? Where had they come from? Why was Carrington here? Why had Scarsdale been arrested?

Jack bore up manfully, answering as best he could.

"Perhaps you can tell me the whereabouts of my wife and this lady's husband?" said the Consul.

"They have been staying here," he replied, "but they have gone."

"Gone!" cried Allingford in blank amazement. "Gone! Where? When?"

"Why, to Salisbury," replied Jack. "I sent them over there early this morning."

"You did, did you?" spluttered the Consul. "What right had you to send them anywhere?"

"Why, to join you at Lady Diana's."

"Join us!" screamed Allingford. "Why, we left Melton Court at half-past four this morning, and have been on the road ever since trying to join them."

"It seems to be a typical example of cross-purposes," replied Carrington.

"It's pure cussedness!" said the Consul.

"But I thought my husband was – in prison," chimed in Mrs. Scarsdale; "the paper said so."

"Merely a case of mistaken identity," Jack hastened to assure her. "I had him set free in no time. And that reminds me: I ran across your brother here last evening, Allingford. It is he who has caused all the trouble. Frankly, I am almost sorry I did not give him over to the police."

"I wish you had," replied the Consul; "I wouldn't have bailed him out till my honeymoon was over. Where is he now?"

"I'm inclined to believe," replied Carrington, "that he has gone to Melton Court in search of you, in company with a man who talked some nonsense about your having stolen an elephant from him."

Allingford and Mrs. Scarsdale both began to laugh.

"I don't see anything funny about that," said Jack.

"Oh, don't you?" returned the Consul. "Well, you would if you knew the rest of the story." And in a few brief words he explained

about the elephant's arrival and their subsequent flight.

"Heavens, man!" cried Carrington, "you don't seem to realise what you have let Scarsdale and your wife in for!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the Consul, "I never thought of that. Why, I reckon it's rampaging all over the place by this time, and the old lady must be in a perfect fury. When's the next train back? We can't get there too quickly."

"One goes in five minutes," said Jack.

"If I'd ever suspected," gasped Mrs. Scarsdale to Allingford as they rushed down the platform, "that you were laying such a trap for my poor husband – "

"I'm sure I didn't do it on purpose," he replied; "but if they happen to meet the catawampus after she's met the elephant, they'll be in for a pretty hot time."

"Your brother was bad enough," she groaned as the train pulled out; "but as for your elephant – ! It's worse than being arrested!"

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH LADY MELTON RECEIVES A STRANGE VISITOR

However harassing and disturbing the events of the past few days had been to the people particularly interested in them, to the mind of one the proceedings of all those with whom he had come in contact had been characterised by an ignorance, not only of the necessities of life, but even of the very etiquette that lends a becoming dignity to existence, which seemed almost pitiful. Not since the elephant left his native shore had he received what he considered to be proper, or even intelligent, attention. On the voyage, indeed, though his quarters were crowded, and denied by the proximity of low-caste beasts, his material wants had been considered; but since yesterday, when he had landed in the midst of a howling wilderness of iron monsters, who could neither see nor hear and were no respecters of persons, there had been a scarcity even of food and water. All night he had been dragged about the country at a speed unbecoming the dignity of a ruler of the jungle (without even the company of his mahout, who had lost the train at Southampton); and, now that the earth had ceased to move past him and was once more still, he expressed his opinion of the ignorant and degraded people of this wretched country in no uncertain voice. Then, finding that the pen in which

he was confined was cramped and dirty, and wholly unfitted for one of his exalted position, he exerted himself to be free, and in a short time reduced his car to kindling-wood. Being now at liberty, he naturally desired his breakfast; but what was one to do when men disfigured the earth with bars of steel over which one tripped, and stored the fruits of the land in squat yellow bungalows, with fluted iron roofs which were difficult to tear off? Therefore the elephant lifted up his voice in rage, whereat many things happened, and a high-caste man, clad in the blue of the sky and the gold of the sun, ran up and down upon the earth, and declared that he should forthwith be taken to the "Court" and delivered to the "Damconsul."

What a "Damconsul" was the elephant did not know; but concluded that it was the title these barbarous people bestowed on the Maharajah of that district. Since he lived at a Court, it seemed certain that he would know how to appreciate and fittingly entertain him. The elephant therefore consented to follow his attendant slaves, though they understood not the noble art of riding him, but were fain to lead him like a beast of burden. On the way he found a spring of sweet water, of which he drank his fill, despite the protestations of his leaders and the outcries of the inhabitants of the bungalow of the well, whose lamentations showed them to be of low caste and little sensible of the honour done them.

The procession at length reached the gate of the Court; and while the attendants were in the lodge explaining matters to the

astonished keeper, the elephant, realising that "drink was good but food better," determined to do a little foraging on his own account, and so moved softly off, taking along the stake to which his keepers fondly imagined he was tethered.

He judged that he was now in the park of the Court of the "Damconsul"; and the fact that there were many clumps of familiar plants scattered over the grass increased his belief that this was the case. He tried a few coleus and ate a croton or two; but found them insipid and lacking the freshness of those which bloomed in his native land. Then turning to a grove of young palms, he tore a number up by the roots; which he found required no expenditure of strength, and so gave him little satisfaction. Moreover, they grew in green tubs, which rolled about between his feet and were pitfalls for the unwary. He lay down on a few of the beds; but the foliage was pitifully thin and afforded him no comfortable resting-place; moreover, there were curious rows of slanting things which glistened in the sunlight, and which he much wished to investigate. On examination he found them quite brittle, and easily smashed a number of them with his trunk. Nor was this all, for in the wreckage he discovered a large quantity of most excellent fruit – grapes and nectarines and some very passable plums. Evidently the "Damconsul" was an enlightened person, who knew how to live; and, indeed, it is not fitting for even an elephant to turn up his trunk at espalier peaches at a guinea apiece.

Certainly, thought the elephant, things might be worse. And

after a bath in a neighbouring fountain, which cost the lives of some two score of goldfish, he really felt refreshed, and approached the palace, which he considered rather dingy, in order to pay his respects to its owner. Coming round to the front of the building he discovered a marble terrace, gleaming white in the sunshine, and flanked by two groups of statuary – Hercules with his club, and Diana with her bow: though, being unacquainted with Greek mythology, he did not recognise them as such. On the terrace itself was set a breakfast-table resplendent with silver and chaste with fair linen; and by it sat a houri, holding a sunshade over her golden head. The elephant, wishing to conciliate this vision of beauty, advanced towards her, trumpeting gently; but his friendly overtures were evidently misinterpreted, for the houri, giving a wild scream, dropped her sunshade, and fled for safety to the shoulders of Hercules, from which vantage-point she called loudly for help.

Feeling that such conduct was indecorous in the extreme, he ignored her with a lofty contempt; and, having tested the quality of the masonry, ventured upon the terrace and inspected the feast. There were more nectarines – but he had had enough of those – and something steaming in a silver vessel, the like of which he remembered to have encountered once before in the bungalow of a sahib. Moreover, he had not forgotten how it spouted a boiling liquid when one took it up in one's trunk. At this moment a shameless female slave appeared at a window, in response to the cries of the houri, and abused him. He could

not, it is true, understand her barbarous language; but the tone implied abuse. Such an insult from the scum of the earth could not be allowed to pass unnoticed. He filled his trunk with water from a marble basin near at hand, and squirted it at her with all his force, and the scum of the earth departed quickly.

"It would be well," thought the elephant, "to find the 'Damconsul' before further untoward incidents could occur"; and with this end in view, he turned himself about, preparatory to leaving the terrace. He forgot, however, that marble may be slippery; his hind legs suddenly slid from under him, and he sat hurriedly down on the breakfast-table. It was at this singularly inopportune moment that Lady Diana appeared upon the scene.

Her ladyship awoke that morning to what was destined to be the most eventful and disturbing day of her peaceful and well-ordered life, with a feeling of irritation and regret that it had dawned, which, in the light of subsequent events, would seem to have been almost a premonition of coming evil. She was, though at this early hour she little knew it, destined to receive a series of shocks of volcanic force and suddenness, between sunrise and sunset, any one of which would have served to overthrow her preconceived notions of what life, and especially life at Melton Court, ought to be.

As yet she knew nothing of all this; but she did know that, though it was long after the hour appointed, she had heard no sound of her great-niece's departing footsteps. She waited till she must have missed the train, and then rang her bedroom bell

sharply to learn why her orders had been disobeyed.

"If you please, my lady," replied her maid in answer to her mistress's questions, "Bright did not go because we could not find Mrs. Scarsdale."

"Could not find my niece! And why not, pray?" demanded her ladyship angrily.

"She was not in her room, my lady, or anywhere about the Court; only this note, directed to your ladyship, on her dressing-table."

"Why didn't you say so to begin with, then?" cried her mistress testily. "Open the window, that I may see what this means."

The note was short and painstakingly polite; but its perusal did not seem to please Lady Diana, for she frowned and set her thin lips as she re-read it. The missive ran as follows:

"Dear Lady Melton,

"I write to apologise for the somewhat unconventional manner in which I am leaving your house; but as your plans for my disposal to-day did not accord with my own ideas of what is fitting, I have thought it best to leave thus early, and so avoid any awkwardness which might arise from conflicting arrangements. I wish you to know that I shall be with friends by this evening, so that you need feel no anxiety about my position. Pray accept my thanks for your hospitality, which I am sure my husband will much appreciate, and believe me,

"Yours respectfully,

"Mabel Scarsdale."

This communication her ladyship tore up into small fragments, and then snapped out:

"Is there anything more?"

"Yes, if you please, my lady," replied the maid; "a note for you from Mr. Allingford, left in his room."

Lady Melton took it as gingerly as if it were fresh from some infected district, and, spreading it out on the bed before her, read it with a contemptuous smile.

"Your Ladyship," wrote the Consul, "I have the honour to inform you that I am leaving at the earliest possible moment, not wishing to impose my company longer than is absolutely necessary where it is so evidently undesired. That there may be no burden of obligation between us, I beg you to accept a trunk belonging to me, which will arrive this morning, as compensation for my board and lodging.

"I remain

"Your Ladyship's Obedient Servant,

"Robert Allingford,

"U.S. Consul, Christchurch, England.

"P.S. – I mail you to-day a deed of gift of the property in question, legally attested, so that there may be no question of ownership.

"R. A."

"Insolence!" gasped Lady Melton, when she comprehended the contents of this astonishing communication. Then turning to her maid, she commanded:

"If this person's trunk arrives here, have it sent back to him instantly." And she fumed with rage at the thought.

"How dare he suppose that I would for a moment accept a gratuity!"

Indeed, so wrought up was she that it was with difficulty that she controlled herself sufficiently to breakfast on the terrace. Moreover, her interview with Bright, the butler, whom she encountered on her way downstairs and who announced the arrival of her great-nephew and a strange lady, was hardly soothing; for it forced her to believe that that faithful servant, after years of probity, had at last strayed from the temperate paths of virtue. Seeing him dishevelled and bewildered, she had sternly rebuked him for his appearance, and from his disjointed replies had only gathered that his astounding state was in some way due to the Consul.

"Has that insolent person's trunk arrived?" she inquired; when, to her astonishment, her old retainer, who had always observed in her presence a respectful and highly deferential demeanour, actually tittered.

"Bright!" she said sternly.

"Beg pardon, my lady," giggled Bright, his face still wreathed in smiles; "but the way you put it."

"What have you done with this person's belongings? Have my orders been carried out?"

"You mean in regard to the – the –"

"Trunk. Yes, let it be put off the place immediately."

"Please, your ladyship," he replied, with difficulty restraining his laughter, "it won't go."

"Will not go?"

"No, my lady; it's been rampaging through the greenhouses, and is now on the terrace, where it douched Anne most awful."

"Leave me at once, Bright, and do not let me see you again till you are in a more decent state," she commanded, and swept by him, ignoring his protestations of innocence and respect.

She found Scarsdale awaiting her in the reception-room, and accorded him a very frigid greeting, suggesting that they should have their interview on the terrace, where he had left Mrs. Allingford safely ensconced in an armchair, while he went to meet his great-aunt.

Her ladyship had been considerably ruffled both by her interview with Bright and by the arrival of Scarsdale, towards whom, in the light of recent events, she felt a strong resentment; and a vision of the Consul's wife perched most indecorously on the shoulders of Hercules, which she beheld as she emerged on the terrace, did not tend to calm her already excited nerves. But before she could speak her eyes followed the direction of the unknown lady's gaze, and she saw, for the first time, her unwelcome visitor.

When you come suddenly face to face with an elephant seated amidst the wreck of cherished Chippendale and ancestral Sèvres, it is not calculated to increase your composure or equalise your temper; and Lady Diana may be pardoned, as the vastness of

the Consul's impudence dawned upon her, for giving vent to expressions both of anger and amazement, albeit her appearance produced no less of a disturbance in the breast of him who sat amidst the ruins of the breakfast-table. The elephant felt that in the presence of the Maharanee, for such he believed her to be, his position was undignified. She was, without doubt, the wife of the "Damconsul," and, as such, should be paid all proper respect and deference. He, therefore, bowed his head in submission, completing in the process his work of destruction. Whereat Mrs. Allingford shrieked and clung more closely to the protecting shoulders of Hercules.

Serious as the situation was, it was not without its humorous side, and it took all Scarsdale's command of himself to control his face sufficiently to address his relative with becoming respect.

"Why, aunt," he said, "I didn't know that you had gone in for pets!"

"Harold Stanley Malcolm St. Hubart Scarsdale," replied her ladyship – she prided herself on never forgetting a name – "you are one of the most impudent and worthless young men that I have the honour to count among my relatives; but you have been in India, and you ought to know how to manage this monster."

"I've seen enough of them," he answered. "What do you want him to do?"

"Do!" she cried wrathfully. "I should think anybody would know that I wished it to get up and go away."

"Oh," said he, and made a remark in Hindustani to the

elephant, whereat the beast gradually and deliberately proceeded to rise from the wreck of the breakfast, till he seemed to the spectators to be forty feet high. Then, in response to Scarsdale's cries of "Mail! mail!" (Go on) he turned himself about, and, after sending the teapot through the nearest window with a disdainful kick of one hind leg, he lurched down the steps of the terrace and on to the lawn, where he remained contentedly standing, gently rocking to and fro, while he meditatively removed from his person, by means of his trunk, the fragments of the feast, with which he was liberally bespattered.

Scarsdale, seeing that his lordship was in an amicable frame of mind, hastened to assist Mrs. Allingford to descend from her somewhat uneasy perch.

"St. Hubart," said Lady Melton, who, throughout this trying ordeal, had lost none of her natural dignity, "you have done me a service. I shall not forget it."

Scarsdale thought it would be difficult to forget the elephant.

"I will even forgive you," she continued, "for marrying that American."

"It was so good of you to receive my wife," he said. "I trust you are pleased with her."

"I am not pleased at all," she said sharply. "I consider her forward and disrespectful, and I am glad she is gone."

"Gone!" he exclaimed.

"You may well be surprised," said his great-aunt, "but such is the case."

"But where has she gone?"

"That I do not know; she left without consulting me, and against my advice and wishes."

"Did she go alone?"

"She went," replied her ladyship, "with one of the most insolent persons it has ever been my misfortune to meet. He is owner of that!" And she pointed to the elephant.

"But who is he?" demanded Scarsdale, not recognising, from her description, his friend the Consul.

"He disgraces," she continued, "a public office given him by a foreign Government."

"You are surely not talking about Allingford!" he exclaimed.

"That, I believe, is his name," replied Lady Melton.

"What, my husband!" cried the Consul's wife, who up to this point had kept silence. "You dare to call my husband a disgrace – !" Here Mrs. Allingford became dumb with indignation.

"If he is your husband," returned her ladyship, "I am exceedingly sorry for you. As for 'daring' to apply to him any epithet I please, I consider myself fully justified in so doing after the indignity to which he has condemned me. I am glad, however, to have met you, as I am thus enabled to return you your husband's property, with the request that you take your elephant and leave my grounds as quickly as possible."

"Do you mean to say that my husband owns that monster?" gasped Mrs. Allingford.

"Such is the case," replied Lady Melton, "and I leave it in your

hands. St. Hubart, I trust *you* will join me at breakfast as soon as another can be prepared."

"Excuse me," he said apologetically, "but really, you know, I can't leave Mrs. Allingford in the lurch. Besides, I must follow my wife."

His great-aunt faced round in a fury.

"That is sufficient!" she cried. "Leave my presence at once! I never desire to see either of you again."

"Don't let us part as enemies, aunt," he said, offering her his hand; but she swept past him into the house.

Scarsdale gloomily watched her depart, and then became conscious of a hand laid on his arm.

"I am so sorry!" murmured Mrs. Allingford. "I only seem to bring you trouble."

"Oh, you mustn't feel badly about this," he said. "We have quarrelled ever since I was born. I'm much more worried about you."

"What am I going to do with it?" she exclaimed, looking hopelessly at her husband's property as it stood rocking before her.

"The first thing is to get it off the place," replied Scarsdale, assuming a cheerfulness which he did not feel. "We may find its keepers at the lodge, and we can make our plans as we walk along."

"Come on, Jehoshaphat, or whatever you may happen to be called!" he cried, addressing the elephant, and at the same time

grasping the rope bridle which still dangled from its neck; and the beast, recognising a kindred spirit speaking to him in his native tongue, followed docilely where he led.

"I think," continued Scarsdale, as they trudged slowly across the park, "that our best course will be to take the elephant to Christchurch. Indeed, we ought to have gone there in the first instance."

"What do you expect to gain by that?" she asked quickly, ready in this strange dilemma to catch at any straw which gave opportunity of escape.

"Why, your husband's consulate is situated there, and that is his local habitation in this country, where he is certain to turn up sooner or later, and where, if the laws of his consular service are anything like ours, he would be obliged to report every few days."

"You propose to go there and await his return?"

"Yes," he said. "I don't see that we can do better. Ten to one your husband and my wife will hear of our affair at Winchester, and may be on their way there now to hunt us up; while if we attempted to follow them, it is more than likely that they would return here. I, for one, am about tired of chasing myself around the country; as a steady occupation it is beginning to pall."

"There is a group of men at the lodge," she said, as they drew near the gates with the elephant in tow.

"Then let us hope that there are some station people among them, and that we can arrange for Jehoshaphat's transportation without loss of time," replied Scarsdale.

His hope was, in the first instance, justified; for the station-master at Salisbury, learning of the Consul's early departure that morning, and beginning to doubt the wisdom of inflicting the elephant on so important a personage as Lady Melton, had come up to the Court himself to see how things were going, and had been horrified beyond measure at the exaggerated reports of the lodgekeeper as to the havoc the beast had created. He was therefore unfeignedly relieved at Scarsdale's arrival; a relief, however, which instantly gave way to stubborn opposition at the first hint of putting the animal again in his charge.

Elephants were not in his line, he pointed out, and he had no desire to transport them about the country. Couldn't think of acting without receiving advices from the main offices of the railway company in London, an affair of several days; wouldn't assume charge of the creature during the interval on any account; and shouldn't stir a step in the matter till the wrecked van had been paid for.

This ended the affair, as far as Scarsdale was concerned. He had no intention of paying damages for the Consul's elephant, but he wished to deliver it and the Consul's wife at Christchurch as soon as possible. If this could not be accomplished one way, it must be another. There were plenty of horses and carriages to be had; indeed, the landau and pair which had brought them from Salisbury was still at the gates. The roads were good, the distance to Christchurch was not excessive – say thirty miles – and the elephant could walk. It merely remained to find a leader

or driver, and they could start at once on their journey across country.

All this he explained to his fair companion, and she readily acquiesced.

"The only problem to be solved, then, is where to find a mahout," he said in conclusion.

She threw him an inquiring glance; but he felt it was asking too much, and said so.

"If it were any other country, I'd ride the beast myself to oblige you; but in England, and as a representative of one of the first families of the county, I couldn't. The prejudices of the locality would never recover from the shock, and I should not be able to show my face in the streets of Salisbury. But perhaps we can find a substitute. Is there any one here," he went on, addressing the little group of men, "who understands an elephant?"

"Tom, 'e knows the bloomin' beasts," said a member of the company; and Tom, groom to her ladyship, and cockney every inch of him, was pushed forward for inspection.

One glance at the trim form, concealed though it was by stable costume, was sufficient to assure Scarsdale that he had found his man.

"You have been a soldier," he said, "and in India?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, touching the peak of his cap in a military salute.

"Do you think you could manage him?" continued Scarsdale, indicating the elephant, which, wearied with the morning's

exertions, had knelt down, and seemed on the point of taking a nap.

"Do I think as 'ow I could manage 'im? I should 'ope so, if I ain't fergot is 'eathen language, sir."

"I'll give you eighteen pence a mile," said Scarsdale, quick to act on the man's decision.

"Make it two bob, sir, an' I'll ride 'im ter Inja."

"That's too far," he replied, laughing; "my pocket wouldn't stand the strain; but I'll give you the price to Christchurch."

"Right you are," replied the hostler, closing the bargain at once. "Me name's Tom Ropes. What d'yer call 'im, sir?" pointing to his recumbent charge.

"I don't know what he was christened. I call him Jehoshaphat."

"A Christian name fer a 'eathen brute," commented Tom.

"Give me a leg up, one er yer."

Once astride the beast's neck, with Scarsdale's cane as an improvised ankus, he poured out a flood of cockney-Indian jargon which no Hindoo could ever have recognised as his native tongue, but which evidently had a familiar sound to the elephant, who proceeded to rise, first with his fore feet and then with his hind feet; after which his novel mahout, who throughout these manœuvres had retained a precarious hold by one ear, hastened to seat himself more firmly upon him.

"All right?" queried Scarsdale, looking up; and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, added: "Keep your feet well under his ears, and hit him on the head with your stick if he gets fractious.

All you need do is to follow our carriage. Trust to his judgment about bridges; he knows what will hold him."

Arrangements, on a liberal scale, having been made for the use of the conveyance which had brought them from the station, they were ready to start in a very short space of time; Scarsdale stipulating that they head towards Southampton, taking the least travelled roads, and in any event giving Salisbury a wide berth. This was agreed to; and thereupon commenced one of the most extraordinary progresses that had ever stirred up a staid and conventional countryside: Scarsdale and Mrs. Allingford leading off in the landau, since it was necessary to keep the horse well in front of the elephant, and Tom and his charge plodding on in their wake.

As they left the lodge behind them and came out into the open country, the Consul's wife, turning to her companion in misfortune, said, between tears and smiles:

"What do you think is going to happen next?"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THERE ARE TWO CLAIMANTS FOR ONE DINNER

The village clock was on the stroke of one when the little procession drew up before the door of the principal inn in the main square of a small town on the road between Salisbury and Southampton.

Scarsdale had been surprised to find how little excitement they had created in their progress through the countryside; but then he had chosen the most unfrequented roads, avoiding villages as he would a pestilence. Man and beast must be fed somewhere, however, and, according to Tom, the elephant was giving no uncertain signs that he wanted his dinner. So, against his better judgment, Scarsdale had turned aside into a neighbouring town, whence, after an hour's rest and refreshment, he determined to push on that afternoon to a quiet inn he knew of, near Fording Bridge, and thence to Christchurch the following morning.

Both he and Mrs. Allingford had been as quiet as mice during the last hour; indeed, the novel position in which they found themselves inclined them rather to thought than conversation.

Their entrance into the town was effected more easily than could have been hoped for; though, in some unknown manner, a rumour of their coming seemed to have preceded them: for

a crowd had collected along the main street, which cheered them vociferously, under the mistaken impression that they were the proprietors of a circus. No travelling show that wound its course through those country lanes had ever possessed such an attraction, and the people moved away after they had passed, full of wonder at the appearance of this strange monster among them, and regret that with such a beginning there was nothing more to follow.

Once they had come to a halt, they were surrounded by a curious crowd, and Scarsdale lost no time in entering into explanations with the landlord of the inn, who came hurrying out to receive his novel guests.

It was at this point that their troubles first began; for mine host, while he professed to furnish entertainment for man and beast, was dubious concerning the monster which it was proposed to quarter on him so unexpectedly. The lady and gentleman, their coachman, horses, and even the cockney mahout were more than welcome; but elephants were not in his line of business. He didn't know if he could give satisfaction; feared his accommodations were not sufficiently ample; would like to oblige, but had the reputation of his house to maintain, &c., &c.

When Scarsdale happened, however, casually to mention that it was Lady Melton's elephant a change came over the face of affairs, of which he was not slow to take advantage.

Her ladyship was well known throughout the county, while her reputation for severity had a still wider circulation, and

the landlord was in abject fear of her, though, nevertheless, obstinately determined to have none of the beast.

The subject of all this altercation had meantime appropriated the public horse-trough to his exclusive use for drinking and bathing purposes, and was enjoying himself in consequence, which was more than could be said of his rider, who shared unwillingly in his ablutions.

"Give 'im the word to sit down, sir. S'welp me, I'll be drowned with 'is tricks!" cried Tom.

"I don't speak his infernal language," returned Scarsdale testily; "that's your business."

"I've told 'im all I know, sir, an' it's no use."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to stay up and get wet."

"Couldn't yer 'elp me down, sir? Quit that, yer 'eathen!" as he dodged a shower of water.

"Certainly not," replied Scarsdale. "You can't leave him riderless in a public place."

Then, turning to the landlord, who stood by in sore perplexity, aimlessly rubbing his hands, he continued:

"It's a beastly shame that a gentleman can't take a lady's elephant out for – exercise without running up against all this nonsense in the first little hamlet he comes across! One would almost think you had never seen an elephant before."

The landlord, whose eyes had up to this time been fairly bulging with curiosity, now declared himself desolated at such an uncalled-for suspicion.

"Perhaps it would be better if the gentleman were to send for a constable."

Mine host neglected to add that he had done so on his own responsibility in his first burst of agitation.

But Scarsdale, noting the excellent effect which his rating had produced on the landlord, determined that he should have some more of it.

"If you are afraid," he said, "of damaging your ramshackle old inn, perhaps you'll consent to give my elephant his dinner in the square?"

Mine host rolled up his eyes at this new phase of the question.

"I suppose," continued Scarsdale, "that the dignity of this 'tuppenny ha'penny' town won't be seriously impaired by his presence for an hour in your elegant plaza!"

The last portion of this speech was lost on the landlord, because he did not know what a "plaza" was; but it sounded imposing, and he hastened to assure his guest that the town would feel honoured by the elephant's presence, though he would have to procure a permit from the mayor. Should he show him the way to that functionary's house?

This, however, proved to be unnecessary, as the mayor himself was present in the crowd, a pompous, fussy little man, full of the importance of his office. Lady Melton's name, which he had heard mentioned in connection with the affair, acted as a charm, and brought him bustling forward to shake Scarsdale's hand, assure him that no permit was required, and snub the

innkeeper.

"Anything I can do for a relation of her ladyship's – I think you said a relation?" he inquired.

Scarsdale had not said anything of the kind, but unwillingly admitted that he was her nephew. Upon receiving this intelligence the mayor positively beamed, called Scarsdale "your lordship," and became most solicitous after Lady Melton's health. Her nephew gravely assured him that he might make his mind easy on that score, as his aunt was in the best of health, and that as soon as he returned to Melton Court (a most uncertain date, he thought grimly) he would be sure to convey to her his kind inquiries.

His worship on this was positively effusive, declared himself devoted to Scarsdale's interests, and insisted that he and "her ladyship," indicating Mrs. Allingford – another slip which his companion did not trouble to correct – must do him the honour of dining with Mrs. Mayor and himself.

Scarsdale was now beginning to fear that he was doing it rather too well, and hastened to excuse "her ladyship" and himself, declaring that they could not think of trespassing on his worship's hospitality, and that they would be quite comfortable at the inn, if only the elephant might be permitted to have his dinner in the square.

The mayor declared that it was just what he most desired; but would his lordship kindly indicate of what that meal must consist?

This was a poser; but Scarsdale plunged recklessly on, for, having once entered the broad road of deception, there was no turning back, and he was surprised himself at the facility with which he could romance.

"That is just the trouble of taking charge of other people's pets," he said, with shameless indifference to the demands of truth. "I'm sure I don't know much more about the brute than you do; and as his mahout was away when we started out, I had to take one of the grooms. What *does* Jehoshaphat eat, Tom?"

"Hay, sir – me lud, I mean," answered Tom, falling in with the humour of the situation.

"Oh! hay, of course," said Scarsdale.

"How much, your lordship?" queried the mayor.

"How much? Confound it! how should I know? Do you take me for an elephant trainer?" A remark which nearly reduced his worship to chaos; but Scarsdale, relenting, added:

"Say five or six tons – I don't know."

"But it is not easy, my lord, to procure such an amount at short notice," expostulated the official.

"Oh, then, get him a waggon-load or two as a first course, and we'll find something else a little later."

"It shall be procured at once. I – er – trust your lordship will not take it amiss, since you will not dine with me, if I offer you a glass of – shall we say champagne?"

"With pleasure," said Scarsdale.

"And her ladyship?" looking towards the carriage.

Mrs. Allingford bowed, and the mayor whispered a few words in mine host's ear.

Just at that moment, as Scarsdale was drawing his first easy breath, feeling at last that things were going smoothly, the very worst *contretemps* that could possibly happen occurred. Two dusty figures shambled around the corner of a neighbouring street into the square, and one of them in a high-pitched voice, that was distinctly heard by every member of the crowd, exclaimed:

"Hi, there! What are you doing with my elephant?"

Scarsdale swung round to face the newcomers, a premonition of coming evil strong upon him, though a careful inspection assured him that he knew them not; yet conviction hang in every note of that challenge.

They were, in a word, the owner of elephants and the unregenerate Dick.

From early dawn they had made their way across country, in as straight a line as possible from Winchester to Salisbury, sometimes on foot and sometimes in such conveyances as they could hire from place to place; but ever buoyed up by hope – hope of finding that which was lost; hope of restoring elephants to their rightful owners; hope of clearing a brother's name. And here, unexpectedly, they had come upon the object of their search in the hands of total strangers.

"Who the devil are you?" cried Scarsdale hotly, scenting danger, and determined to face the worst at once. "I don't know

you."

"I'm Richard Allingford," said the larger of the two men, pushing forward till he faced the bewildered Englishman.

At this point Scarsdale, whose coolness alone could have saved the situation, lost his head. His temper, which had been severely tried by the vicissitudes of the day, gave way in the presence of the man whose escapades had caused him such needless suffering and indignity, and, regardless of results, he spoke his mind.

"So you're Richard Allingford, are you? Then allow me to tell you that you are the prettiest scoundrel that I've run across in a long time! Curse you! Do you know I've spent two days, this week, in Winchester jail on your account?"

A broad grin broke over Richard's face.

"I guess you must be Scarsdale," he said. "But what in thunder are you doing with my brother's elephant?"

"It's mine!" arose the shrill voice of his companion. "I tell you he stole it from me!"

This was too much for Mrs. Allingford, and, to make a bad matter worse, she cried from the carriage:

"The Consul did not steal the elephant! It is his property, and I'm his wife!"

A voice from the crowd chimed in:

"But 'e said it was 'er ladyship's helephant!"

The mayor's face was a study in its various shades of suspicion – anger at being, as he very naturally supposed, duped; and

certainly of the duplicity of all concerned, as the contradictory conversation continued. And there is no knowing how quickly he might have precipitated the final catastrophe, if the elephant had not chosen this opportunity for creating a diversion on his own account, which, for the time being, distracted every one's thoughts. He had had, it will be remembered, a very light breakfast, which only served to whet the edge of his appetite. It therefore took him but a short time to locate the whereabouts of a lad who, emerging from the inn with an appetising dinner of bacon and greens arranged in a basket balanced on his head, stood gaping on the outskirts of the crowd, unmindful of the cooling viands. Some playful breeze must have wafted the savoury odour of cabbage to the elephant's nostrils; for suddenly, and without previous warning, flinging his trunk in the air with a joyous trumpet, he pounded down the road, nearly unseating his rider, and scattering the crowd to right and left.

"Wait for me when you get to Christchurch!" Scarsdale called to Tom as the latter shot past him, and then joined in the rush which followed close on the elephant's heels, the mayor and the landlord well to the fore; while Mrs. Allingford's driver, who was only human, increased the confusion by whipping up his horses and joining in the chase.

Ahead of the excited beast and the noisy throng which followed it, holding on like grim death to his dinner-basket, fled the worse-scared boy that had ever been seen in that town. Fortunately the chase was of short duration, for the cubicle of the

telegraph-clerk at the railway station was just ahead, and offered a ready refuge. Into it flew the lad, dinner and all, and slammed the door, just in time to escape from the elephant's curling trunk.

The beast, despoiled of his meal, circled the building trumpeting with rage, and finally took up a position across the rails, where he stood guard, prepared to fall upon any one who should venture out.

All the station attendants and officials were now added to the crowd which swarmed about the elephant, and the business of the town practically came to a standstill.

The station-master only added to the excitement by declaring that a train for Salisbury was due, and that the line must be cleared; while the telegraph-clerk announced from an upper storey that wild horses, let alone elephants, would not drag him forth from the shelter of his office, and the blubbering of the unfortunate boy made a monotonous accompaniment to his speech. The mayor blustered, the navvies swore, Tom addressed floods of unintelligible jargon to the obstinate beast, and, as a last resort, Scarsdale coaxed and wheedled him in very defective Hindustani. But it was all useless; not an inch would the elephant budge, and no one in all that assemblage was clever enough to think of giving him the telegraph-clerk's dinner.

In the midst of this confusion, a shrill whistle was heard in the distance, and some one with a clearer head than the rest cried out to "set the signals against the train" – a suggestion which was at once acted upon, and in a moment more the engine drew up,

panting, within a dozen feet of the elephant, who was so intent on the contents of the cubicle that he never noticed its arrival.

As a general thing, it is the American tourist who alights from a train on no provocation, while his English cousin is content to sit quiet, and leave the affairs of the line in the hands of the company. In this case, however, some subtle sense of the unusual obstacle seemed to have communicated itself to the passengers; for no sooner had the engine halted than heads were thrust out of every window, and the greatest excitement prevailed.

"I don't know if Scarsdale and my wife are here," said Allingford, who, in company with Carrington and Mrs. Scarsdale, occupied one of the forward carriages, "but there is her ladyship's elephant!"

"You're right," cried his fair companion, taking his place at the window. Then, as she caught sight of Scarsdale, she exclaimed "St. Hubart!" and pushing open the door, jumped out, and fled down the line.

"By Jove! that's my wife!" exclaimed the Consul, fleeing after her, and upsetting a porter in his haste.

From a distance Carrington saw a confused mingling of four persons, and sighed as he caught himself wondering if he would ever be fool enough to do that sort of thing in public.

As he slowly approached them he heard scraps of their conversation.

"By the way, Allingford," Scarsdale was saying, "I brought you back your elephant, which it seems you were careless

enough, in the hurry of departure, to leave behind you at Melton Court. I hope you are properly grateful."

"Oh, it isn't mine," replied the Consul; "it belongs to her Ladyship."

"Well, she said it was yours," returned her nephew.

"Ah, that was merely her excessive amiability," said Allingford.

"It had not struck me in that light before," replied Scarsdale. "Anyway, I've brought it back to you, and a nice time I've had of it."

"Did you pilot it all the way from Melton Court?" queried the Consul.

"I did," replied the Englishman, "through the main streets of this town; that is where my Indian training stood me in good stead; but it has ruined my character – most of the inhabitants look on me with suspicion."

"Was your holding up of our train intentional?"

"No," said Scarsdale regretfully, "it wasn't. There are lots of damages to pay, I assure you."

"You must settle them with Lady Melton."

"But what am I to do with the beast?"

"My dear fellow," returned the Consul, "I've been your wife's devoted slave for the last two days, and I have restored her safe and sound to your arms, but I really can't undertake to manage your aunt's elephants into the bargain."

"But at least you might advise me."

"Turn him over to Cassim."

"To whom?"

"Why, to his own mahout, the little brown man who is dancing round him now. I discovered him tearing his hair at Southampton station, where he was left by mistake yesterday, and brought him along."

"Then for heaven's sake make him get his beast off the line!" cried Scarsdale, dragging Allingford up to the native keeper.

"My lord desireth his mid-day meal, and the sahib of the watch-tower hath it within," explained that functionary.

"Tell his lordship that he'll have a great deal better dinner if he will go back to the square," said Allingford.

Just what the mahout said to the elephant will never be known, but it proved convincing: for, with a grunt of dissatisfaction, the beast consented to retrace his steps.

"And now that we have settled this little matter," said the Consul, "there is nothing left for us but to express our unbounded gratitude to – well, to the elephant for reuniting us all, and start once more on our honeymoons; for which this train is mighty convenient."

"I have a word to say about that," cried the mayor. "I'm by no means satisfied about the ownership of this elephant. I've been given to understand that it belongs to Lady Melton. Is this so?"

"Yes," said the Consul and Mr. and Mrs. Scarsdale.

"No," said Mrs. Allingford, Carrington, Tom, and the original owner, in one and the same breath.

"I say, Bob, did you steal it after all?" queried the graceless Richard.

"I took it in payment of a debt," replied his brother hotly.

"Only twenty pounds!" groaned the elephant man. "It's as good as a steal!"

"And I gave it to Lady Melton," continued the Consul, "in payment for my board and lodging."

"And she gave it to me," said Mrs. Allingford.

"I lost my lord at the place of docks," wailed the mahout.

"E 'ired me to ride hit," cried Tom, indicating Scarsdale.

"And what right have you to it, sir?" blustered the mayor, turning to that gentleman.

"I don't know," replied Scarsdale.

"I consider this most unsatisfactory," continued his worship. "I think I may define the actions of those who have had a hand in this affair as – ahem! – contradictory and open to question. I shall telegraph Lady Melton, and pending her reply I must detain you all as suspicious characters."

So it came to pass that the nine, gathered together in the chief parlour of the inn, with a constable on duty, awaited for some hours a response to the mayor's telegram. It arrived finally, embodied in the person of Aunt Eliza, who had gone to Melton Court that morning, and was now fresh from an interview with the mayor, which had resulted in the freedom of all concerned.

The old lady looked the couples over through her eye-glasses, and gave vent to an expressive "Humph!"

To her niece alone did she deign to express herself more fully, nor did she scruple to mince her words.

"Well, Mabel," she remarked, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I gave you a first-class recommendation only two days ago, as being well fitted to plan and carry out a honeymoon, and look what a mess you've made of it! Where did you come from last?"

"From Winchester," replied her niece, "where I was looking for my husband, who had been arrested for impersonating Mr. Allingford's brother," and she pointed to Dick, who joined the group on hearing his name mentioned.

"What business have you to be holding a public office, with a brother like that?" Miss Cogbill demanded sternly of the Consul; but noting his evident discomfiture, she had the grace to add:

"You're by no means a fool, however, barring your habit of losing things. That deed of gift you presented to Lady Melton was a clever stroke of business, and has helped you all out of a bad hole."

"Have you seen her ladyship? What did she say?" cried the Consul.

"She said a good deal," replied Aunt Eliza. "Naturally she was pretty mad, for the beast had done a heap of damage, but she was bound to admit you weren't to blame for its getting loose, and, as I pointed out to her, you had a right to pay for your board and lodging if you chose, though, from the looks of her ramshackle old place, I thought you'd given more than the accommodation

was worth. Besides which there were grievances and plenty on your side of the question. By her own showing she hadn't been decently civil to you, and had turned over that monster to your deserted and defenceless wife, and cast my nephew adrift, and tried to send my niece home with the butler. Her ladyship saw the justice of my remarks. She means well, but her training's against her. When I came to the elephant, though, I struck a snag, for she gave me to understand that she'd turned it off the place and never wanted to hear of it again. 'Now, your ladyship,' says I, 'turning an elephant adrift in the world isn't like casting your bread upon the waters; you're bound to find it before many days.' And I hadn't more than got the words out of my mouth when in came that telegram from the mayor, saying that traffic was blocked on the railway in both directions, and nine people arrested, all along of that beast. Her ladyship's lawyer," continued Aunt Eliza, indicating a gentleman of unmistakably legal appearance who had followed her into the room, "backed me up by pointing out that the deed of gift was good, and the elephant her property, and that she'd be obliged to pay for any damage it might do; after which she climbed down from her ancestral tree quick enough, and was willing to listen to reason. So here I am, and here is the lawyer; and now, if you please, we will attend to business."

This she proceeded to do, and in an amazingly short space of time, with the authority of the lawyer, had settled the scruples of the mayor; received a release of indebtedness from the Consul, who willingly surrendered his papers, declaring that he had had

"more than twenty pounds' worth of fun out of the elephant"; and transferred the documents to the lawyer, with instructions to sell the beast to the original consignees at Southampton, and to remit the purchase-money to the elephant man, less the twenty pounds for damages, which, she added, "Just cancels his debt to the Consul, making him square on the transaction."

The lawyer patted his hands, saying:

"Very well argued, Miss Cogbill."

"Lady Melton," said Aunt Eliza, turning to Mr. and Mrs. Scarsdale and Mr. and Mrs. Allingford, "has authorised me to say, on her behalf, that she overlooks and regrets the events of the last few days, and wishes them to be forgotten. In token of which she requests you four to dine with her, and spend the night at Melton Court; and I may add that you'll be fools if you don't accept." After which dissent was impossible.

"And I want to tell you," said Miss Cogbill, turning to Carrington, "that you've managed this affair very well; and as I'm in want of a likely young man as my business agent, if you call on me to-morrow in town, we'll see if we can't find something more profitable for you to do than hunting up stray honeymooners."

"Say!" interjected the graceless Richard, who was far from pleased at the turn affairs had taken – "Say, where do I come in?"

"Young man," said Aunt Eliza, turning on him like a flash, "did you buy a return ticket to America?"

"Yes, but –"

"Well, then," she interrupted, "you use it, the first chance you

get. And as for you," addressing the two married couples, "the sooner you start for Melton Court the better; and don't let me hear of your being lost again."

"Aren't you coming with us, Miss Cogbill?" asked Scarsdale.

"The lawyer and I," replied that lady, "are the only two responsible persons in this crowd, and we'll stay right here and look after – Her Ladyship's Elephant."