

Miss Cayley's Adventures.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

X.—THE ADVENTURE OF THE CROSS-EYED Q.C.

THE "cold weather," as it is humorously called, was now drawing to a close, and the young ladies in sailor hats and cambric blouses who flock to India each autumn for the annual marriage-market were beginning to resign themselves to a return to England—unless, of course, they had succeeded in "catching." So I realized that I must hurry on to Delhi and Agra, if I was not to be intercepted by the intolerable summer.

When we started from Moozuffernuggar for Delhi and the East, Lord Southminster was starting for Bombay and Europe. This surprised me not a little, for he had confided to my unsympathetic ear a few nights earlier, in the Maharajah's billiard-room, that he was "stony broke," and must wait at Moozuffernuggar for lack of funds "till the oof-bird laid" at his banker's in England. His conversation enlarged my vocabulary, at any rate.

"So you've managed to get away?" I exclaimed, as he dawdled up to me at the hot and dusty station.

"Yaas," he drawled, fixing his eye-glass, and lighting a cigarette. "I've—p'f—managed to get away. Maharaj seems to have thought—p'f—it would be cheepah in the end to pay me out than to keep me."

"You don't mean to say he offered to lend you money?" I cried.

"No; not exactly that: *I* offahed to borrow it."

"From the man you call a nigger?"

His smile spread broader over his face than ever. "Well, we borrow from the Jews, yah know," he said, pleasantly, "so why the jooce shouldn't we borrow from the heathen also? Spoiling the Egyptians, don't yah see?—the same as we used to read about in the Scripchah when we were innocent kiddies. Like marriage, quite. You borrow in haste—and repay at leisure."

He strolled off and took his seat. I was glad to get rid of him at the main line junction.

In accordance with my usual merciful custom, I spare you the details of our visit

to Agra, Muttra, Benares. At Calcutta, Elsie left me. Her health was now quite restored, dear little soul—I felt I had done that one good thing in life if no other—and she could no longer withstand the higher mathematics, which were beckoning her to London with invisible fingers. For myself, having so far accomplished my original design of going round the world with twopence in my pocket, I could not bear to draw back at half the circuit; and Mr. Elworthy having willingly consented to my return by Singapore and Yokohama, I set out alone on my homeward journey.

Harold wrote me from London that all was going well. He had found the will which I drew up at Florence in his uncle's escritoire, and everything was left

to him; but he trusted, in spite of this untoward circumstance, long absence might have altered my determination. "Dear Lois," he wrote, "I *expect* you to come back to England and marry me!"



"HE WROTE, 'I EXPECT YOU TO COME BACK TO ENGLAND AND MARRY ME.'"

It was brief, but categorical. Nothing, meanwhile, had altered my resolve. I did not wish to be considered mercenary. While he was rich and honoured, I could never take him. If, some day, fortune frowned—but, there—let us not forestall the feet of calamity: let us await contingencies.

Still, I was heavy in heart. If only it had been otherwise! To say the truth, I should be thrown away on a millionaire; but just think what a splendid managing wife a girl like me would have made for a penniless pauper!

At Yokohama, however, while I dawdled in curiosity shops, a telegram from Harold startled me into seriousness. My chance at last! I knew what it meant; that villain Higginson!

"Come home at once. I want your evidence to clear my character. Southminster opposes the will as a forgery. He has a strong case; the experts are with him."

Forgery! That was clever. I never thought of that. I suspected them of trying to forge a will of their own; but to upset the real one—to throw the burden of suspicion on Harold's shoulders—how much subtler and craftier!

I saw at a glance it gave them every advantage. In the first place, it put Harold virtually in the place of the accused, and compelled him to defend instead of attacking—an attitude which prejudices people against one from the outset. Then, again, it implied positive criminality on his part, and so allowed Lord Southminster to assume the air of injured innocence. The eldest son of the eldest brother, unjustly set aside by the scheming machinations of an unscrupulous cousin! Primogeniture, the ingrained English love for keeping up the dignity of a noble family, the prejudice in favour of the direct male line as against the female—all were astutely utilized in Lord Southminster's interest. But worst of all, it was *I* who had type-written the will—I, a friend of Harold's, a woman whom Lord Southminster would doubtless try to exhibit as his *fiancée*. I saw at once how much like conspiracy it looked: Harold and I had agreed together to concoct a false document, and Harold had forged his uncle's signature to it. Could a British jury doubt when a Lord declared it?

Vol. xvi.—87.

Fortunately, I was just in time to catch the Canadian steamer from Japan to Vancouver. But, oh, the endless breadth of that broad Pacific! How time seemed to lag, as each day one rose in the morning, in the midst of space; blue sky overhead; behind one, the hard horizon; in front of one, the hard horizon; and nothing else visible: then steamed on all day, to arrive at night, where?—why, in the midst of space; starry sky overhead; behind one, the dim horizon; in front of one, the dim horizon; and nothing else visible. The Nile was child's play to it.

Day after day we steamed, and night after night were still where we began—in the centre of the sea, no farther from our starting-point, no nearer to our goal, yet for ever steaming. It was endlessly wearisome; who could say what might be happening meanwhile in England?

At last, after months, as it seemed, of this slow torture, we reached Vancouver. There, in the raw new town, a telegram awaited me.



"IT WAS ENDLESSLY WEARISOME."

"Glad to hear you are coming. Make all haste. You may be just in time to arrive for the trial."

Just in time! I would not waste a moment. I caught the first train on the Canadian Pacific, and travelled straight

through, day and night, to Montreal and Quebec, without one hour's interval.

I cannot describe to you that journey across a continent I had never before seen. It was endless and hopeless. I only know that we crawled up the Rocky Mountains and the Selkirk Range, over spider-like viaducts, with interminable effort, and that the prairies were just the broad Pacific over again. They rolled on for ever. But we did reach Quebec—in time we reached it; and we caught by an hour the first liner to Liverpool.

At Prince's Landing-stage another telegram awaited me. "Come on at once. Case now proceeding. Harold is in court. We need your evidence.—GEORGINA FAWLEY."

I might still be in time to vindicate Harold's character!

At Euston, to my surprise, I was met, not only by my dear cantankerous old lady, but also by my friend, the magnificent Maharajah, dressed this time in a frock-coat and silk hat of Bond Street glossiness.

"What has brought you to England?" I asked, astonished. "The Jubilee?"

He smiled, and showed his two fine rows of white teeth. "That, nominally. In reality, the cricket season (I play for Berks). But most of all, to see dear Tillington safe through this trouble."

"He's a brick!" Lady Georgina cried, with enthusiasm. "A regular brick, my dear Lois! His carriage is waiting outside to take you up to my house. He has stood by Harold—well, like a Christian!"

"Or a Hindu," the Maharajah corrected, smiling.

"And how have you been all this time, dear Lady Georgina?" I asked, hardly daring to inquire about what was nearest to my soul—Harold.

The cantankerous old lady knitted her brows in a familiar fashion. "Oh, my dear, don't ask: I haven't known a happy hour since you left me in Switzerland. Lois, I shall never be happy again without you! It would pay me to give you a retaining fee of a thousand a year—honour bright, it would, I assure you. What I've suffered from the Gretchens since you've been in the East has only been equalled by what I've suffered from the Mary Annes and the Célestines. Not a hair left on my scalp; not one hair, I declare to you. They've made my head into a *tabula rasa* for the various restorers. George R. Sims and Mrs. S. A. Allen are going to fight it out between them. My dear, I wish you could take my maid's place; I've always said—"

I finished the speech for her. "A lady can do better whatever she turns her hand to than any of these hussies."

She nodded. "And why? Because her hands *are* hands; while as for the Gretchens and the Mary Annes, 'paws' is the only word one can honestly apply to them. Then, on top of it all comes this trouble about Harold. So distressing, isn't it? You see, at the point which the matter has reached, it's simply impossible to save Harold's reputation without wrecking Southminster's. Pretty position that for a respectable family! The Ashursts hitherto have been *quite* respectable: a co-respondent or two, perhaps, but never anything serious. Now, either Southminster sends Harold to prison, or Harold sends Southminster. There's a nice sort of dilemma! I always knew Kynaston's boys were born fools; but to find they're born knaves, too, is hard on an old woman in her hairless dotage. However, *you've* come, my child, and *you'll* soon set things right. You're the one person on earth I can trust in this matter."

Harold go to prison! My head reeled at the thought. I staggered out into the open air, and took my seat mechanically in the Maharajah's carriage. All London swam before me. After so many months' absence, the polychromatic decorations of our English streets, looming up through the smoke, seemed both strange and familiar. I drove through the first half mile with a vague consciousness that Lipton's tea is the perfection of cocoa and matchless for the complexion, but that it dyes all colours, and won't wash clothes.

After a while, however, I woke up to the full terror of the situation. "Where are you taking me?" I inquired.

"To my house, dear," Lady Georgina answered, looking anxiously at me; for my face was bloodless.

"No, that won't do," I answered. "My cue must be now to keep myself as aloof as possible from Harold and Harold's backers. I must put up at an hotel. It will sound so much better in cross-examination."

"She's quite right," the Maharajah broke in, with sudden conviction. "One must block every ball with these nasty swift bowlers."

"Where's Harold?" I asked, after another pause. "Why didn't he come to meet me?"

"My dear, how could he? He's under examination. A cross-eyed Q.C. with an odious leer. Southminster's chosen the biggest bully at the Bar to support his contention."

"Drive to some hotel in the Jermyn Street

district," I cried to the Maharajah's coachman. "That will be handy for the law courts."

He touched his hat and turned. In a sort of dickey behind sat two gorgeous-turbaned Rajput servants.

That evening Harold came round to visit me at my rooms. I could see he was much agitated. Things had gone very badly. Lady Georgina was there; she had stopped to dine with me, dear old thing, lest I should feel lonely and give way; so had Elsie Petheridge. Mr. Elworthy sent a telegram of welcome from Devonshire. I knew at least that my friends were rallying round me in this hour of trial. The kind Maharajah himself would have come too, if I had allowed him, but I thought it inexpedient. They explained everything to me. Harold had propounded Mr. Ashurst's will—the one I drew up at Florence—and had asked for probate. Lord Southminster intervened and opposed the grant of probate on the ground that the signatures were forgeries. He propounded instead another will, drawn some twenty years earlier, when they were both children, duly executed at the time, and undoubtedly genuine; in it, testator left everything without reserve to the eldest son of his eldest brother, Lord Kynaston.

"Marmy didn't know in those days that Kynaston's sons would all grow up fools," Lady Georgina said tartly. "Besides which, that was before the poor dear soul took to plunging on the Stock Exchange and made his money. He had nothing to leave then but his best silk hat and a few paltry hundreds. Afterwards, when he'd feathered his nest in soap and cocoa, he discovered that Bertie—that's Lord Southminster—was a first-class idiot. Marmy never liked Southminster, nor Southminster Marmy. For after all, with all his faults, Marmy was a gentleman; while Bertie—well, my dear, we needn't put a name to it. So he altered his will, as you know, when he saw the sort of man Southminster turned out, and left practically everything he possessed to Harold."

"Who are the witnesses to the will?" I asked.

"There's the trouble. Who do you think? Why, Higginson's sister, who was Marmy's

massuse, and a waiter—Franz Markheim—at the hotel at Florence, who's dead they say—or, at least, not forthcoming."

"And Higginson's sister forswears her signature," Harold added gloomily; "while the experts are, most of them, dead against the genuineness of my uncle's."

"That's clever," I said, leaning back, and taking it in slowly. "Higginson's sister! How well they've worked it. They couldn't prevent Mr. Ashurst from making this will, but they managed to supply their own tainted witnesses! If it had been Higginson himself now, he'd have had to be cross-examined; and in cross-examination, of course, we could have shaken his credit, by bringing up the episodes of the Count de Laroche-sur-Loiret and Dr. Fortescue-Langley. But his sister! What's she like? Have you anything against her?"

"My dear," Lady Georgina cried, "there the rogue has bested us. Isn't it just like him? What do you suppose he has done? Why, provided himself with a sister of tried respectability and blameless character."

"And she denies that it is her handwriting?" I asked.



"THE CROSS-EYED Q.C. BEGGED HIM TO BE VERY CAREFUL."

"Declares on her Bible oath she never signed the document!"

I was fairly puzzled. It was a stupendously clever dodge. Higginson must have

trained up his sister for forty years in the ways of wickedness, yet held her in reserve for this supreme moment.

"And where is Higginson?" I asked.

Lady Georgina broke into a hysterical laugh. "Where is he, my dear? That's the question. With consummate strategy, the wretch has disappeared into space at the last moment."

"That's artful again," I said. "His presence could only damage their case. I can see, of course, Lord Southminster has no need of him."

"Southminster's the wildest fool that ever lived," Harold broke out bitterly. "Under that mask of imbecility, he's a fox for trickiness."

I bit my lip. "Well, if you succeed in evading him," I said, "you will have cleared your character. And if you don't—then, Harold, our time will have come: you will have your longed-for chance of trying me."

"That won't do me much good," he answered, "if I have to wait fourteen years for you—at Portland."

Next morning, in court, I heard Harold's cross-examination. He described exactly where he had found the contested will in his uncle's *escritoire*. The cross-eyed Q.C., a heavy man with bloated features and a bulbous nose, begged him, with one fat uplifted forefinger, to be very careful. How did he know where to look for it?

"Because I knew the house well: I knew where my uncle was likely to keep his valuables."

"Oh, indeed; *not* because you had put it there?"

The court rang with laughter. My face grew crimson.

After an hour or two of fencing, Harold was dismissed. He stood down, baffled. Counsel recalled Lord Southminster.

The pea-green young man, stepping briskly up, gazed about him, open-mouthed, with a vacant stare. The look of cunning on his face was carefully suppressed. He wore, on the contrary, an air of injured innocence combined with an eye-glass.

"*You* did not put this will in the drawer where Mr. Tillington found it, did you?" counsel asked.

The pea-green young man laughed. "No, I certainly didn't put it theah. My cousin Harold was man in possession. He took jolly good care *I* didn't come neah the premises."

"Do you think you could forge a will if you tried?"

Lord Southminster laughed. "No, I

don't," he answered, with a well-assumed *naïveté*. "That's just the difference between us, don't yah know. *I'm* what they call a fool, and my cousin Harold's a precious clevah fellah."

There was another loud laugh.

"That's not evidence," the judge observed, severely.

It was not. But it told far more than much that was. It told strongly against Harold.

"Besides," Lord Southminster continued, with engaging frankness, "if I forged a will at all, I'd take jolly good care to forge it in my own favah."

My turn came next. Our counsel handed me the incriminated will. "Did you draw up this document?" he asked.

I looked at it closely. The paper bore our Florentine water-mark, and was written with a Spread-Eagle. "I type-wrote it," I answered, gazing at it with care to make sure I recognised it.

Our counsel's business was to uphold the will, not to cast aspersions upon it. He was evidently annoyed at my close examination. "You have no doubts about it?" he said, trying to prompt me.

I hesitated. "No, no doubt," I answered, turning over the sheet and inspecting it still closer. "I type-wrote it at Florence."

"Do you recognise that signature as Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's?" he went on.

I stared at it. Was it his? It was like it, certainly. Yet that *k*? and those *s*'s? I almost wondered.

Counsel was obviously annoyed at my hesitation. He thought I was playing into the enemy's hands. "Is it his, or is it not?" he inquired again, testily.

"It is his," I answered. Yet I own I was troubled.

He asked many questions about the circumstances of the interview when I took down the will. I answered them all. But I vaguely felt he and I were at cross-purposes. I grew almost as uncomfortable under his gaze as if he had been examining me in the interest of the other side. He managed to fluster me. As a witness for Harold, I was a grotesque failure.

Then the cross-eyed Q.C., rising and shaking his huge bulk, began to cross-examine me. "Where did you type-write this thing, do you say?" he said, pointing to it contemptuously.

"In my office at Florence."

"Yes, I understand; you had an office in Florence—after you gave up retailing bicycles

on the public roads. And you had a partner, I think—a Miss Petherick, or Petherton, or Pennyfarthing, or something?”

“Miss Petheridge,” I corrected, while the Court tittered.

“Ah, Petheridge, you call it! Well, now, answer this question carefully. Did your Miss Petheridge hear Mr. Ashurst dictate the terms of his last will and testament?”

hand about the existence of the alleged will is this person Higginson?”

“Miss Petheridge knows,” I said, flushing. “At the time, I told her of it.”

“Oh, *you* told her. Well, that doesn't help us much. If what you are swearing isn't true—remember, you are on your oath—what you told Miss Petherick or Petheridge or Pennyfarthing, ‘at the time,’ can hardly be regarded as corroborative evidence. Your word then and your word now are just equally valuable—or equally worthless. The only person who knows besides yourself is Higginson. Now, I ask you, *where* is Higginson? *Are* you going to produce him?”

The wicked cunning of it struck me dumb. They were keeping him away, and then using his absence to cast doubts on

my veracity. “Stop,” I cried, taken aback. “Higginson is well known to be a rogue, and he is keeping away lest he may damage your side. I know nothing of Higginson.”

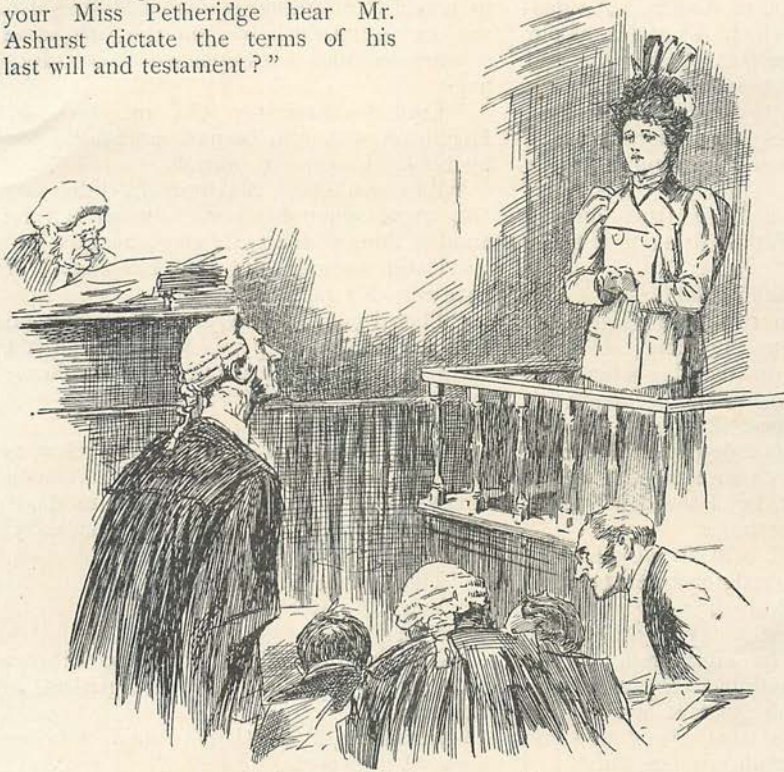
“Yes, I'm coming to that in good time. Don't be afraid that we're going to pass over Higginson. You admit this man is a man of bad character. Now, what do you know of him?”

I told the stories of the Count and of Dr. Fortescue-Langley.

The cross-eyed cross-examiner leant across towards me and leered. “And this is the man,” he exclaimed, with a triumphant air, “whose sister you pretended you had got to sign this precious document of yours?”

“Whom Mr. Ashurst got to sign it,” I answered, red-hot. “It is not *my* document.”

“And you have heard that she swears it is not her signature at all?”



“I WAS A GROTESQUE FAILURE.”

“No,” I answered. “The interview was of a strictly confidential character. Mr. Ashurst took me aside into the back room at our office.”

“Oh, he took you aside? Confidential? Well, *now* we're getting at it. And did anybody but yourself see or hear any part whatsoever of this precious document?”

“Certainly not,” I replied. “It was a private matter.”

“Private! oh, very! Nobody else saw it. Did Mr. Ashurst take it away from the office in person?”

“No; he sent his courier for it.”

“His courier? The man Higginson?”

“Yes; but I refused to give it to Higginson. I took it myself that night to the hotel where Mr. Ashurst was stopping.”

“Ah! You took it yourself. So the only other person who knows anything at first

"So they tell me. She is Higginson's sister. For all I know, she may be prepared to swear, or to forswear, anything."

"Don't cast doubt upon our witnesses without cause! Miss Higginson is an eminently respectable woman. You gave this document to Mr. Ashurst, you say. There your knowledge of it ends. A signature is placed on it which is not his, as our experts testify. It purports to be witnessed by a Swiss waiter, who is not forthcoming, and who is asserted to be dead, as well as by a nurse who denies her signature. And the only other person who knows of its existence before Mr. Tillington 'discovers' it in his uncle's desk is—the missing man Higginson. Is that, or is it not, the truth of the matter?"

"I suppose so," I said, baffled.

"Well, now, as to this man Higginson. He first appears upon the scene, so far as you are concerned, on the day when you travelled from London to Schlangenbad?"

"That is so," I answered.

"And he nearly succeeded then in stealing Lady Georgina Fawley's jewel-case?"

"He nearly took it, but I saved it." And I explained the circumstance.

The cross-eyed Q.C. held his fat sides with his hands, looking incredulously at me, and smiled. His vast width of waistcoat shook with silent merriment. "You are a very clever young lady," he murmured. "You can explain away anything. But don't you think it just as likely that it was a plot between you two, and that owing to some mistake the plot came off unsuccessful?"

"I do not," I cried, crimson. "I never saw the Count before that morning."

He tried another tack. "Still, wherever you went, this man Higginson—the only other person, you admit, who knows about the previous existence of the will—turned up simultaneously. He was always turning up—at the same place as you did. He turned up at Lucerne, as a faith-healer, didn't he?"

"If you will allow me to explain," I cried, biting my lip.

He bowed, all blandness. "Oh, certainly," he murmured. "Explain away everything!"

I explained, but of course he had discounted and damaged my explanation.

He made no comment. "And then," he went on, with his hands on his hips, and his obtrusive rotundity, "he turned up at Florence, as courier to Mr. Ashurst, at the very date when this so-called will was being concocted?"

"He was at Florence when Mr. Ashurst

dictated it to me," I answered, growing desperate.

"You admit he was in Florence. Good! Once more he turned up in India with my client, Lord Southminster, upon whose youth and inexperience he had managed to impose himself. And he carried him off, did he not, by one of these strange coincidences to which *you* are peculiarly liable, on the very same steamer on which *you* happened to be travelling?"

"Lord Southminster told me he took Higginson with him because a rogue suited his book," I answered, warmly.

"Will you swear his lordship didn't say 'the rogue suited his book'—which is quite another thing?" the Q.C. asked blandly.

"I will swear he did not," I replied. "I have correctly reported him."

"Then I congratulate you, young lady, on your excellent memory. My lud, will you allow me later to recall Lord Southminster to testify on this point?"

The judge nodded.

"Now, once more, as to your relations with the various members of the Ashurst family. You introduced yourself to Lady Georgina Fawley, I believe, quite casually, on a seat in Kensington Gardens?"

"That is true," I answered.

"You had never seen her before?"

"Never."

"And you promptly offered to go with her as her lady's maid to Schlangenbad in Germany?"

"In place of her lady's maid, for one week," I answered.

"Ah; a delicate distinction! 'In place of her lady's maid.' You are a lady, I believe; an officer's daughter, you told us; educated at Girton?"

"So I have said already," I replied, crimson.

"And you stick to it? By all means. Tell—the truth—and stick to it. It's always safest. Now, don't you think it was rather an odd thing for an officer's daughter to do—to run about Germany as maid to a lady of title?"

I tried to explain once more; but the jury smiled. You can't justify originality to a British jury. Why, they would send you to prison at once for that alone, if they made the laws as well as dispensing them.

He passed on after a while to another topic. "I think you have boasted more than once in society that when you first met Lady Georgina Fawley you had twopence in your pocket to go round the world with?"

"I had," I answered—"and I went round the world with it."

"Exactly. I'm getting there in time. With it—and other things. A few months later, more or less, you were touring up the Nile in your steam dahabeeah, and in the lap of luxury: you were taking saloon-carriages on Indian railways, weren't you?"

I explained again. "The dahabeeah was in the service of the *Daily Telephone*," I answered. "I became a journalist."

He cross-questioned me about that. "Then I am to understand," he said at last, leaning

"Is that matter relevant?" the judge asked, sharply.

"My lud," the Q.C. said, in his blandest voice, "I am striving to suggest to the jury that this lady—the only person who ever beheld this so-called will till Mr. Harold Tillington—described in its terms as 'Younger of Gledcliffe,' whatever that may be—produced it out of his uncle's desk—I am striving to suggest that this lady is—my duty to my client compels me to say—an adventuress."

He had uttered the word. I felt my



"THE JURY SMILED."

forward with all his waistcoat, "that you sprang yourself upon Mr. Elworthy at sight, pretty much as you sprang yourself upon Lady Georgina Fawley?"

"We arranged matters quickly," I admitted. The dexterous wretch was making my strongest points all tell against me.

"H'm! Well, he was a man: and you will admit, I suppose," fingering his smooth, fat chin, "that you are a lady of—what is the stock phrase the reporters use?—considerable personal attractions?"

"My Lord," I said, turning to the Bench, "I appeal to you. Has he the right to compel me to answer that question?"

The judge bowed slightly. "The question requires no answer," he said, with a quiet emphasis. I burned bright scarlet.

"Well, my lud, I defer to your ruling," the cross-eyed cross-examiner continued, radiant. "I go on to another point. When in India, I believe, you stopped for some time as a guest in the house of a native Maharajah."

character had not a leg left to stand upon before a British jury.

"I went there with my friend, Miss Petheridge——" I began.

"Oh, Miss Petheridge once more—you hunt in couples?"

"Accompanied and chaperoned by a married lady, the wife of a Major Balmossie, on the Bombay Staff Corps."

"That was certainly prudent. One ought to be chaperoned. Can you produce the lady?"

"How is it possible?" I cried. "Mrs. Balmossie is in India."

"Yes; but the Maharajah, I understand, is in London?"

"That is true," I answered.

"And he came to meet you on your arrival yesterday."

"With Lady Georgina Fawley," I cried, taken off my guard.

"Do you not consider it curious," he asked, "that these Higginsons and these Maharajahs should happen to follow you so

closely round the world?—should happen to turn up wherever you do?"

"He came to be present at this trial," I exclaimed.

"And so did you. I believe he met you at Euston last night, and drove you to your hotel in his private carriage."

would benefit by it. Please reply to this question, yes or no, without prevarication. Are you or are you not conditionally engaged to Mr. Harold Tillington?"

"If I might explain——" I began, quivering.

He sneered. "You have a genius for explaining, we are aware. Answer me first, yes or no; we will qualify afterward."

I glanced appealingly at the judge. He was adamant. "Answer as counsel directs you, witness," he said, sternly.

"Yes, I am," I faltered. "But——"

"Excuse me one moment. You promised to marry him conditionally upon the result of Mr. Ashurst's testamentary dispositions?"

"I did," I answered; "but——"

My explanation was drowned in roars of laughter, in which the judge joined, in spite of himself. When the mirth in court had subsided a little, I went on: "I told Mr. Tillington I would only marry him in case he was poor and without expectations. If he inherited Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's money, I could never be his wife." I said it proudly.

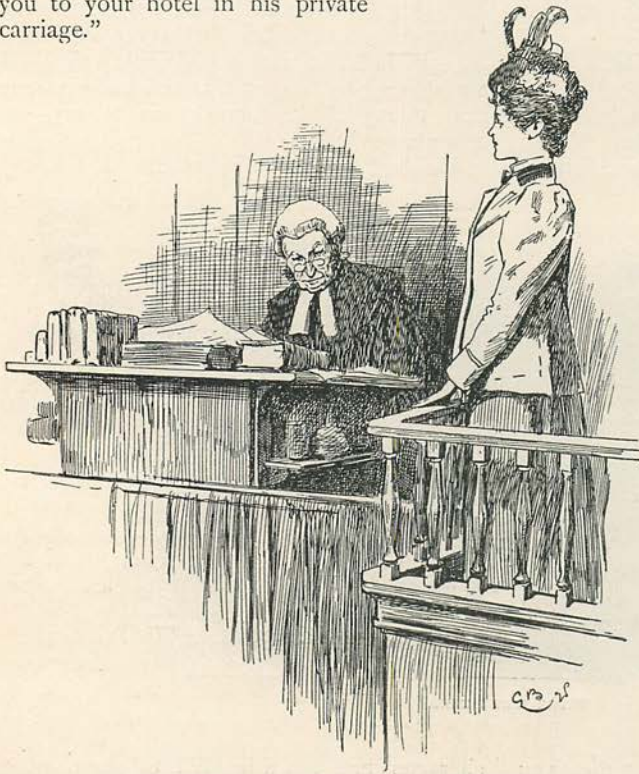
The cross-eyed Q.C. drew himself up and let his rotundity take care of itself. "Do you take me," he inquired, "for one of Her Majesty's horse marines?"

There was another roar of laughter—feebly suppressed by a judicial frown—and I slunk away, annihilated.

"You can go," my persecutor said. "I think we have got—well, everything we wanted from you. You promised to marry him, if all went ill! That is a delicate feminine way of putting it. Women like these equivocations. They relieve one from the onus of speaking frankly."

I stood down from the box, feeling, for the first time in my life, conscious of having scored an ignominious failure.

Our counsel did not care to re-examine me; I recognised that it would be useless. The hateful Q.C. had put all my history in such an odious light that explanation could only make matters worse—it must savour of



"THE QUESTION REQUIRES NO ANSWER, HE SAID."

"With Lady Georgina Fawley," I answered, once more.

"And Lady Georgina is on Mr. Tillington's side, I fancy? Ah, yes, I thought so. And Mr. Tillington also called to see you; and likewise Miss Petherick—I beg your pardon, Petheridge. We must be strictly accurate—where Miss Petheridge is concerned. And, in fact, you had quite a little family party."

"My friends were glad to see me back again," I murmured.

He sprang a fresh innuendo. "But Mr. Tillington did not resent your visit to this gallant Maharajah?"

"Certainly not," I cried, bridling. "Why should he?"

"Oh, we're getting to that too. Now answer me this carefully. We want to find out what interest you might have, supposing a will were forged, on either side, in arranging its terms. We want to find out just who

apology. The jury could never understand my point of view. It could never be made to see that there are adventuresses and adventuresses.

Then came the final speeches on either side. Harold's advocate said the best he could in favour of the will our party propounded; but his best was bad; and what galled me most was this—I could see he himself did not believe in its genuineness. His speech amounted to little more than a perfunctory attempt to put the most favourable face on a probable forgery.

As for the cross-eyed Q.C., he rose to reply with humorous confidence. Swaying his big body to and fro, he crumpled our will and our case in his fat fingers like so much flimsy tissue-paper. Mr. Ashurst had made a disposition of his property twenty years ago—the right disposition, the natural disposition; he had left the bulk of it as childless English gentlemen have ever been wont to leave their wealth—to the eldest son of the eldest son of his family. The Honourable Marmaduke Courtney Ashurst, the testator, was the scion of a great house, which recent agricultural changes, he regretted to say, had relatively impoverished; he had come to the succour of that great house, as such a scion should, with his property acquired by honest industry elsewhere. It was fitting and reasonable that Mr. Ashurst should wish to see the Kynaston peerage regain, in the person of the amiable and accomplished young nobleman whom he had the honour to represent, some portion of its ancient dignity and splendour.

But jealousy and greed intervened. (Here he frowned at Harold.) Mr. Harold Tillington, the son of one of Mr. Ashurst's married sisters, cast longing eyes, as he had tried to suggest to them, on his cousin Lord Southminster's natural heritage. The result, he feared, was an unnatural intrigue. Mr. Harold Tillington formed the acquaintance of a young lady—should we say young lady?—(he withered me with his glance)—well, yes, a lady, indeed, by birth and education, but an adventuress by choice—a lady who, brought up in a respectable, though not (he must admit) a distinguished sphere, had lowered herself by accepting the position of a lady's maid, and had trafficked in patent American cycles on the public high-roads of Germany and Switzerland. This clever and designing woman (he would grant her ability—he would grant her good looks) had fascinated Mr. Tillington—that was the theory he ventured to lay before the

jury to-day; and the jury would see for themselves that whatever else the young lady might be, she had distinctly a certain outer gift of fascination. It was for them to decide whether Miss Lois Cayley had or had not suggested to Mr. Harold Tillington the design of substituting a forged will for Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's undeniable testament. He would point out to them her singular connection with the missing man Higginson, whom the young lady herself described as a rogue, and from whom she had done her very best to dissociate herself in this court—but ineffectually. Wherever Miss Cayley went, the man Higginson went independently. Such frequent recurrences, such apt juxtapositions could hardly be set down to mere accidental coincidence.

He went on to insinuate that Higginson and I had concocted the disputed will between us; that we had passed it on to our fellow-conspirator, Harold; and that Harold had forged his uncle's signature to it, and had appended those of the two supposed witnesses. But who, now, were these witnesses? One, Franz Markheim, was dead or missing; dead men tell no tales: the other was obviously suggested by Higginson. It was his own sister. Perhaps he forged her name to the document. Doubtless he thought that family feeling would induce her, when it came to the pinch, to accept and endorse her brother's lie; nay, he might even have been foolish enough to suppose that this cock-and-bull will would not be disputed. If so, he and his master had reckoned without Lord Southminster, a gentleman who concealed beneath the careless exterior of a man of fashion the solid intelligence of a man of affairs, and the hard head of a man not to be lightly cheated in matters of business.

The alleged will had thus not a leg to stand upon. It was "type-written" (save the mark!) "from dictation" at Florence, by whom? By the lady who had most to gain from its success—the lady who was to be transformed from a shady adventuress, tossed about between Irish doctors and Hindu Maharajahs, into the lawful wife of a wealthy diplomatist of noble family, on one condition only—if this pretended will could be satisfactorily established. The signatures were forgeries, as shown by the expert evidence, and also by the oath of the one surviving witness.

The will left all the estate—practically—to Mr. Harold Tillington, and five hundred pounds to whom?—why, to the accomplice

Higginson. The minor bequests the Q.C. regarded as ingenious inventions, pure play of fancy, "intended to give artistic verisimilitude," as Pooh-Bah says in the opera, "to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." The fads, it was true, were known fads of Mr. Ashurst's: but what sort of fads? Bimetallism? Anglo-Israel? No, braces and shoe-horns—clearly the kind that would best be known to a courier like Higginson, the sole begetter, he believed, of this nefarious conspiracy.

The cross-eyed Q.C., lifting his fat right hand in solemn adjuration, called upon the jury confidently to set aside this ridiculous fabrication, and declare for a will of undoubted genuineness, a will drawn up in London by a firm of eminent solicitors, and preserved ever since by the testator's bankers. It would then be for his lordship to decide whether in the public interest he should recommend the Crown to prosecute on a charge of forgery the clumsy fabricator of this preposterous document.

The judge summed up—strongly in favour of Lord Southminster's will. If the jury believed the experts and Miss Higginson, one verdict alone was possible. The jury retired for three minutes only. It was a foregone conclusion. They found for Lord Southminster. The judge, looking grave, concurred in their finding. A most proper verdict. And he considered it would be the duty of the Public Prosecutor to pursue Mr. Harold Tillington on the charge of forgery.

I reeled where I sat. Then I looked round for Harold.

He had slipped from the court, unseen, during counsel's address, some minutes earlier!

That distressed me more than anything else on that dreadful day. I wished he had stood up in his place like a man to face this vile and cruel conspiracy.

I walked out slowly, supported by Lady Georgina, who was white as a ghost herself, but very straight and scornful. "I always knew Southminster was a fool," she said, aloud; "I always knew he was a sneak; but I did not know till now he was also a particularly bad type of criminal."

On the steps of the court, the pea-green young man met us. His air was jaunty. "Well, I was right, yah see," he said, smiling and withdrawing his cigarette. "You backed the wrong fellah! I told you I'd win. I won't say moah now; this is not the time or place to recur to that subject; but, by-and-bye, you'll come round; you'll think bettah of it still; you'll back the winnah!"

I wished I were a man, that I might have the pleasure of kicking him.

We drove back to my hotel and waited for Harold. To my horror and alarm, he never came near us. I might almost have doubted him—if he had not been Harold.

I waited and waited. He did not come at all. He sent no word, no message. And all that evening we heard the newsboys shouting at the top of their voice in the street, "Extra Speshul! the Ashurst Will Kise; Sensational Developments! Mysterious Disappearance of Mr. 'Arold Tillington."



"I REELED WHERE I SAT."