

Miss Cayley's Adventures.

XII.—THE ADVENTURE OF THE UNPROFESSIONAL DETECTIVE.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

"**L**S Lady Georgina at home?"
The discreet man-servant in sober black clothes eyed me suspiciously. "No, miss," he answered. "That is to say—no, ma'am. Her ladyship is still at Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's—the late Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's, I mean—in Park Lane North. You know the number, ma'am?"

"Yes, I know it," I replied, with a gasp; for this was indeed a triumph. My one fear had been lest Lord Southminster should already have taken possession—why, you will see hereafter; and it relieved me to learn that Lady Georgina was still at hand to guard my husband's interests. She had been living at the house, practically, since her brother's death. I drove round with all speed, and flung myself into my dear old lady's arms.

She kissed me on both cheeks with unwonted tenderness. "Lois," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "you're a brick!" It was not exactly poetical at such a moment, but from her it meant more than much gushing phraseology.

"And you're here in possession!" I murmured.

The Cantankerous Old Lady nodded. She was in her element, I must admit. She dearly loved a row—above all, a family row; but to be in the thick of a family row, and to feel herself in the right, with the law against her—that was joy such as Lady Georgina had seldom before experienced. "Yes, dear," she burst out volubly, "I'm in possession, thank Heaven. And what's more, they won't oust me without a legal process. I've been here, off and on, you know, ever since poor dear Marny died, looking after



"I'VE HELD THE FORT BY MAIN FORCE."

"Kiss me," I cried, flushed. "I am your niece!" But she knew it already, for our movements had been fully reported by this time (with picturesque additions) in the morning papers. Imagination, ill-developed in the English race, seems to concentrate itself in the lower order of journalists.

things for Harold; and I shall look after them still, till Bertie Southminster succeeds in ejecting me, which won't be easy. Oh, I've held the fort by main force, I can tell you; held it like a Trojan. Bertie's in a precious great hurry to move in, I can see; but I won't allow him. He's been

down here this morning, fatuously blustering, and trying to carry the post by storm, with a couple of policemen."

"Policemen!" I cried. "To turn you out?"

"Yes, my dear, policemen: but (the Lord be praised) I was too much for him. There are legal formalities to fulfil yet; and I won't budge an inch, Lois, not one inch, my dear, till he's fulfilled every one of them. Mark my words, child, that boy's up to some devilry."

"He is," I answered.

"Yes, he wouldn't be in such a rampaging hurry to get in—being as lazy as he's empty-headed—takes after Gwendoline in that—if he hadn't some excellent reason for wishing to take possession: and depend upon it, the reason is that he wants to get hold of something or other that's Harold's. But he sha'n't if I can help it; and thank my stars, I'm a dour woman to reckon with. If he comes, he comes over my old bones, child. I've been overhauling everything of Marmy's, I can tell you, to checkmate the boy if I can; but I've found nothing yet, and till

"I know you will, dear," I assented, kissing her, "and so I shall venture to leave you, while I go out to institute another little inquiry."

"What inquiry?"

I shook my head. "It's only a surmise," I said, hesitating. "I'll tell you about it later. I've had time to think while I've been coming back in the train, and I've thought of many things. Mount guard till I return, and mind you don't let Lord Southminster have access to anything."

"I'll shoot him first, dear." And I believe she meant it.

I drove on in the same cab to Harold's solicitor. There I laid my fresh doubts at once before him. He rubbed his bony hands. "You've hit it!" he cried, charmed. "My dear madam, you've hit it! I never did like that will. I never did like the signatures, the witnesses, the look of it. But what could I do? Mr. Tillington propounded it. Of course it wasn't my business to go dead against my own client."

"Then you doubted Harold's honour, Mr. Hayes?" I cried, flushing.



"NEVER!" HE ANSWERED. "NEVER!"

I've satisfied myself on that point, I'll hold the fort still, if I have to barricade that pasty-faced scoundrel of a nephew of mine out by piling the furniture against the front door—I will as sure as my name's Georgina Fawley!"

"Never!" he answered. "Never! I felt sure there must be some mistake somewhere, but not any trickery on—your husband's part. Now, *you* supply the right clue. We must look into this, immediately."

He hurried round with me at once in the same cab to the court. The incriminated will had been "impounded," as they call it; but, under certain restrictions, and subject to the closest surveillance, I was allowed to examine it with my husband's solicitor, before the eyes of the authorities. I looked at it long with the naked eye and also with a small pocket lens. The paper, as I had noted before, was the same kind of foolscap as that which I had been in the habit of using at my office in Florence; and the type-writing—was it mine? The longer I looked at it, the more I doubted it.

After a careful examination I turned round to our solicitor. "Mr. Hayes," I said, firmly, having arrived at my conclusion, "this is *not* the document I type-wrote at Florence."

"How do you know?" he asked. "A different machine? Some small peculiarity in the shape of the letters?"

"No, the rogue who typed this will was too cunning for that. He didn't allow himself to be foiled by such a scholar's mate. It is written with a Spread Eagle, the same sort of machine precisely as my own. I know the type perfectly. But——" I hesitated.

"But what?"

"Well, it is difficult to explain. There is character in typewriting, just as there is in handwriting, only, of course, not quite so much of it. Every operator is liable to his own peculiar tricks and blunders. If I had some of my own typewritten manuscript here to show you, I could soon make that evident."

"I can easily believe it. Individuality runs through all we do, however seemingly mechanical. But are the points of a sort that you could make clear in court to the satisfaction of a jury?"

"I think so. Look here, for example. Certain letters get habitually mixed up in typewriting; *c* and *v* stand next one another on the keyboard of the machine, and the person who typed this draft sometimes strikes a *c* instead of a *v*, or *vice versâ*. I never do that. The letters I tend to confuse are *s* and *w*, or else *e* and *r*, which also come very near one another in the arbitrary arrangement. Besides, when I type-wrote the original of this will, I made no errors at all; I took such very great pains about it."

"And this person did make errors?"

"Yes; struck the wrong letter first, and then corrected it often by striking another rather hard on top of it. See, this was a *v* to begin with, and he turned it into a *c*.

Besides, the hand that wrote this will is heavier than mine: it comes down *thump, thump, thump*, while mine glides lightly. And the hyphens are used with a space between them, and the character of the punctuation is not exactly as I make it."

"Still," Mr. Hayes objected, "we have nothing but your word. I'm afraid, in such a case, we could never induce a jury to accept your unsupported evidence."

"I don't want them to accept it," I answered. "I am looking this up for my own satisfaction. I want to know, first, who wrote this will. And of one thing I am quite clear: it is *not* the document I drew up for Mr. Ashurst. Just look at that *x*. The *x* alone is conclusive. My typewriter had the upper right-hand stroke of the small *x* badly formed, or broken, while this one is perfect. I remember it well, because I used always to improve all my lower-case *x*'s with a pen when I re-read and corrected. I see their dodge clearly now. It is a most diabolical conspiracy. Instead of forging a will in Lord Southminster's favour, they have substituted a forgery for the real will, and then managed to make my poor Harold prove it."

"In that case, no doubt, they have destroyed the real one, the original," Mr. Hayes put in.

"I don't think so," I answered, after a moment's deliberation. "From what I know of Mr. Ashurst, I don't believe it is likely he would have left his will about carelessly anywhere. He was a secretive man, fond of mysteries and mystifications. He would be sure to conceal it. Besides, Lady Georgina and Harold have been taking care of everything in the house ever since he died."

"But," Mr. Hayes objected, "the forger of this document, supposing it to be forged, must have had access to the original, since you say the terms of the two are identical; only the signatures are forgeries. And if he saw and copied it, why might he not also have destroyed it?"

A light flashed across me all at once. "The forger *did* see the original," I cried, "but not the fair copy. I have it all now! I detect their trick! It comes back to me vividly! When I had finished typing the copy at Florence from my first rough draft, which I had taken down on the machine before Mr. Ashurst's eyes, I remember now that I threw the original into the waste-paper basket. It must have been there that evening when Higginson called and asked for the

will to take it back to Mr. Ashurst. He called for it, no doubt, hoping to open the packet before he delivered it and make a copy of the document for this very purpose. But I refused to let him have it. Before he saw me, however, he had been left by himself for ten minutes in the office; for I remember coming out to him and finding him there alone: and during that ten minutes, being what he is, you may be sure he fished out the rough draft and appropriated it!"

"That is more than likely," my solicitor nodded. "You are tracking him to his lair. We shall have him in our power."

in his plans; but who would marry such a piece of moist clay? Besides, I could never have taken anyone but Harold." Then another clue came home to me. "Mr. Hayes," I cried, jumping at it, "Higginson, who forged this will, never saw the real document itself at all; he saw only the draft: for Mr. Ashurst altered one word *viva voce* in the original at the last moment, and I made a pencil note of it on my cuff at the time: and see, it isn't here, though I inserted it in the final clean copy of the will—the word 'especially.' It grows upon me more and more each minute that the real instrument is



"WE SHALL HAVE HIM IN OUR POWER."

I grew more and more excited as the whole cunning plot unravelled itself mentally step by step before me. "He must then have gone to Lord Southminster," I went on, "and told him of the legacy he expected from Mr. Ashurst. It was five hundred pounds—a mere trifle to Higginson, who plays for thousands. So he must have offered to arrange matters for Lord Southminster if Southminster would consent to make good that sum and a great deal more to him. That odious little cad told me himself on the *Jumna* they were engaged in pulling off 'a big coup' between them. He thought then I would marry him, and that he would so secure my connivance

hidden somewhere in Mr. Ashurst's house—Harold's house—our house; and that *because* it is there, Lord Southminster is so indecently anxious to oust his aunt and take instant possession."

"In that case," Mr. Hayes remarked, "we had better go back to Lady Georgina without one minute's delay, and, while she still holds the house, institute a thorough search for it."

No sooner said than done. We jumped again into our cab and started. As we drove back, Mr. Hayes asked me where I thought we were most likely to find it.

"In a secret drawer in Mr. Ashurst's desk," I answered, by a flash of instinct, without a second's hesitation.

"How do you know there's a secret drawer?"

"I don't know it. I infer it from my general knowledge of Mr. Ashurst's character. He loved secret drawers, ciphers, cryptograms, mystery-mongering."

"But it was in that desk that your husband found the forged document," the lawyer objected.

Once more I had a flash of inspiration or intuition. "Because White, Mr. Ashurst's valet, had it in readiness in his possession," I answered, "and hid it there, in the most obvious and unconcealed place he could find, as soon as the breath was out of his master's body. I remember now Lord Southminster gave himself away to some extent in that matter. The hateful little creature isn't really clever enough, for all his cunning—and with Higginson to back him—to mix himself up in such tricks as forgery. He told me at Aden he had had a telegram from 'Marmy's valet,' to report progress; and he received another, the night Mr. Ashurst died, at Moozuffernuggar. Depend upon it, White was more or less in this plot; Higginson left him the forged will when they started for India; and as soon as Mr. Ashurst died White hid it where Harold was bound to find it."

"If so," Mr. Hayes answered, "that's well; we have something to go upon. The more of them, the better. There is safety in numbers—for the honest folk. I never knew three rogues hold long together, especially when threatened with a criminal prosecution. Their confederacy breaks down before the chance of punishment. Each tries to screen himself by betraying the others."

"Higginson was the soul of this plot," I went on. "Of that you may be sure. He's a wily old fox, but we'll run him to earth yet. The more I think of it, the more I feel sure, from what I know of Mr. Ashurst's character, he would never have put that will in so exposed a place as the one where Harold says he found it."

We drew up at the door of the disputed house just in time for the siege. Mr. Hayes and I walked in. We found Lady Georgina face to face with Lord Southminster. The opposing forces were still at the stage of preliminaries of warfare.

"Look heah," the pea-green young man was observing, in his drawling voice, as we entered; "it's no use your talking, deah Georgey. This house is mine, and I won't have you meddling with it."

"This house is not yours, you odious little scamp," his aunt retorted, raising her shrill voice some notes higher than usual; "and while I can hold a stick you shall not come inside it."

"Very well, then; you drive me to hostilities, don't yah know. I'm sorry to show disrespect to your grey hairs—if any—but I shall be obliged to call in the police to eject yah."

"Call them in if you like," I answered, interposing between them. "Go out and get them! Mr. Hayes, while he's gone, send for a carpenter to break open the back of Mr. Ashurst's escritoire."

"A carpentah?" he cried, turning several degrees whiter than his pasty wont. "What for? A carpentah?"

I spoke distinctly. "Because we have reason to believe Mr. Ashurst's real will is concealed in this house in a secret drawer, and because the keys were in the possession of White, whom we believe to be your accomplice in this shallow conspiracy."

He gasped and looked alarmed. "No, you don't," he cried, stepping briskly forward. "You don't, I tell yah! Break open Marmy's desk! Why, hang it all, it's my property."

"We shall see about that after we've broken it open," I answered, grimly. "Here, this screw-driver will do. The back's not strong. Now, your help, Mr. Hayes—one, two, three; we can prise it apart between us."

Lord Southminster rushed up and tried to prevent us. But Lady Georgina, seizing both wrists, held him tight as in a vice with her dear skinny old hands. He writhed and struggled, all in vain: he could not escape her. "I've often spanked you, Bertie," she cried, "and if you attempt to interfere, I'll spank you again; that's the long and the short of it!"

He broke from her and rushed out, to call the police, I believe, and prevent our desecration of poor Marmy's property.

Inside the first shell were several locked drawers, and two or three open ones, out of one of which Harold had fished the false will. Instinct taught me somehow that the central drawer on the left-hand side was the compartment behind which lay the secret receptacle. I prised it apart and peered about inside it. Presently, I saw a slip-panel, which I touched with one finger. The pigeon-hole flew open and disclosed a narrow slit. I clutched at something—the will! Ho, victory! the will! I raised it aloft with

a wild shout. Not a doubt of it! The real, the genuine document!

We turned it over and read it. It was my own fair copy, written at Florence, and bearing all the small marks of authenticity about it which I had pointed out to Mr. Hayes as wanting to the forged and impounded document. Fortunately, Lady Georgina and four of the servants had stood by throughout this scene, and had watched our demeanour, as well as Lord Southminster's.

We turned next to the signatures. The principal one was clearly Mr. Ashurst's—I knew it at once—his legible fat hand, "Marmaduke Courtney Ashurst." And then the witnesses? They fairly took our breath away.

"Why, Higginson's sister isn't one of them at all," Mr. Hayes cried, astonished.

A flush of remorse came over me. I saw it all now. I had misjudged that poor woman! She had the misfortune to be a rogue's sister, but, as Harold had said, was herself a most respectable and blameless person. Higginson must have forged her name to the document; that was all; and she had naturally sworn that she never signed it. He knew her honesty. It was a master-stroke of rascality.

"The other one isn't here, either," I exclaimed, growing more puzzled. "The waiter at the hotel! Why, that's another forgery! Higginson must have waited till the man was safely dead, and then used him similarly. It was all very clever. Now, who are these people who really witnessed it?"

"The first one," Mr. Hayes said, examining the handwriting, "is Sir Roger Bland, the Dorsetshire baronet: he's dead, poor fellow; but he was at Florence at the time, and I can answer for his signature. He was a client of mine, and died at Mentone. The second is Captain Richards, of the Mounted

Police: he's living still, but he's away in South Africa."

"Then they risked his turning up?"

"If they knew who the real witnesses were at all—which is doubtful. You see, as you say, they may have seen the rough draft only."

"Higginson would know," I answered. "He was with Mr. Ashurst at Florence at the time, and he would take good care to keep a watch upon his movements. In my belief, it was he who suggested this whole plot to Lord Southminster."

"Of course it was," Lady Georgina put in. "That's absolutely certain. Bertie's a rogue as well as a fool: but he's too great a fool to invent a clever roguery, and too great a knave not to join in it foolishly when anybody else takes the pains to invent it."

"And it *was* a clever roguery," Mr. Hayes interposed. "An ordinary rascal would have forged a later will in Lord Southminster's favour, and run the risk of detection; Higginson had the acuteness to forge a will exactly like the real one, and

to let your husband bear the burden of the forgery. It was as sagacious as it was ruthless."

"The next point," I said, "will be for us to prove it."

At that moment the bell rang, and one of the house-servants—all puzzled by this conflict of interests—came in with a telegram, which he handed me on a salver. I broke it open, without glancing at the envelope. Its contents baffled me: "My address is Hotel Bristol, Paris; name as usual. Send me a thousand pounds on account at once. I can't afford to wait. No shillyshallying."

The message was unsigned. For a moment, I couldn't imagine who sent it, or what it was driving at.

Then I took up the envelope. "Viscount



"VICTORY."

Southminster, 24, Park Lane North, London."

My heart gave a jump. I saw in a second that chance or Providence had delivered the conspirators into my hands that day. The telegram was from Higginson! I had opened it by accident.

It was obvious what had happened. Lord Southminster must have written to him on the result of the trial, and told him he meant to take possession of his uncle's house immediately. Higginson had acted on that hint, and addressed his telegram where he thought it likely Lord Southminster would receive it earliest. I had opened it in error, and that, too, was fortunate, for even in dealing with such a pack of scoundrels, it would never have occurred to me to violate somebody else's correspondence had I not thought it was addressed to me. But having arrived at the truth thus unintentionally, I had, of course, no scruples about making full use of my information.

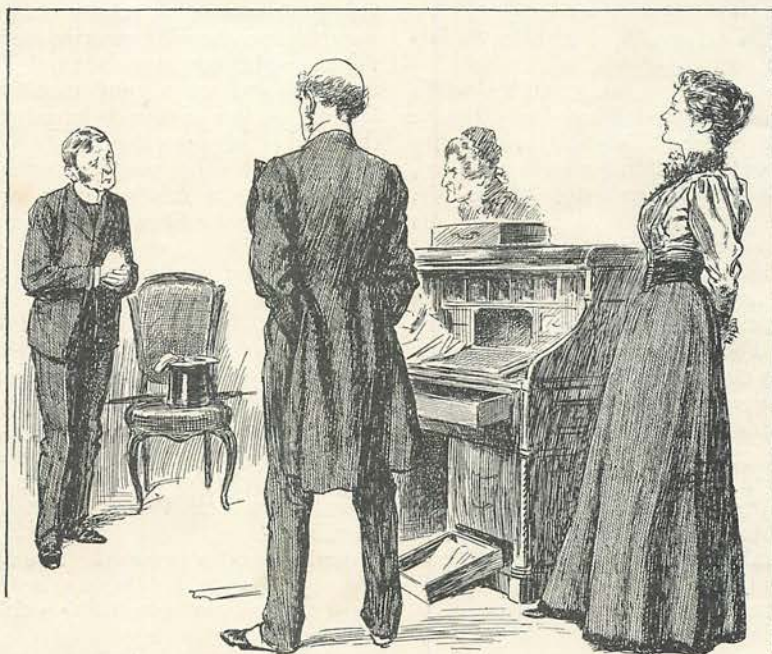
I showed the despatch at once to Lady

valet," he said, quietly. "The moment has now arrived when we can begin to set these conspirators by the ears. As soon as they learn that we know all, they will be eager to inform upon one another."

I rang the bell. "Send up White," I said. "We wish to speak to him."

The valet stole up, self-accused, a timid, servile creature, rubbing his hands nervously, and suspecting mischief. He was a rat in trouble. He had thin brown hair, neatly brushed and plastered down, so as to make it look still thinner, and his face was the average narrow cunning face of the dishonest man-servant. It had an ounce of wile in it to a pound or two of servility. He seemed just the sort of rogue meanly to join in an underhand conspiracy, and then meanly to back out of it. You could read at a glance that his principle in life was to save his own bacon.

He advanced, fumbling his hands all the time, and smiling and fawning. "You wished to see me, sir?" he murmured, in a depre-



"YOU WISHED TO SEE ME, SIR?"

Georgina and Mr. Hayes. They recognised its importance. "What next?" I inquired. "Time presses. At half-past three Harold comes up for examination at Bow Street."

Mr. Hayes was ready with an apt expedient. "Ring the bell for Mr. Ashurst's

catory voice, looking sideways at Lady Georgina and me, but addressing the lawyer.

"Yes, White, I wished to see you. I have a question to ask you. *Who* put the forged will in Mr. Ashurst's desk? Was it you, or some other person?"

The question terrified him. He changed colour and gasped. But he rubbed his hands harder than ever and affected a sickly smile. "Oh, sir, how should I know, sir? I had nothing to do with it. I suppose—it was Mr. Tillington."

Our lawyer pounced upon him like a hawk on a titmouse. "Don't prevaricate with me, sir," he said, sternly. "If you do, it may be worse for you. This case has assumed quite another aspect. It is you and your associates who will be placed in the dock, not Mr. Tillington. You had better speak the truth; it is your one chance, I warn you. Lie to me, and instead of calling you as a witness for our case, I shall include you in the indictment."

White looked down uneasily at his shoes, and cowered. "Oh, sir, I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do. You understand me, and you know I mean it. Wriggling is useless; we intend to prosecute. We have unravelled this vile plot. We know the whole truth. Higginson and Lord Southminster forged a will between them——"

"Oh, sir, *not* Lord Southminster! His lordship, I'm sure——"

Mr. Hayes's keen eye had noted the subtle shade of distinction and admission. But he said nothing openly. "Well, then, Higginson forged, and Lord Southminster accepted, a false will, which purported to be Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst's. Now, follow me clearly. That will could not have been put into the *escritoire* during Mr. Ashurst's life, for there would have been risk of his discovering it. It must, therefore, have been put there afterward. The moment he was dead, you, or somebody else with your consent and connivance, slipped it into the *escritoire*; and you afterwards showed Mr. Tillington the place where you had set it or seen it set, leading him to believe it was Mr. Ashurst's will, and so involved him in all this trouble. Note that that was a felonious act. We accuse you of felony. Do you mean to confess, and give evidence on our behalf, or will you force me to send for a policeman to arrest you?"

The cur hesitated still. "Oh, sir," drawing back, and fumbling his hands on his breast, "you don't mean it."

Mr. Hayes was prompt. "Hesslegrave, go for a policeman."

That curt sentence brought the rogue on his marrow-bones at once. He clasped his hands and debated inwardly. "If I tell you all I know," he said, at last, looking about him

with an air of abject terror, as if he thought Lord Southminster or Higginson would hear him, "will you promise not to prosecute me?" His tone became insinuating. "For a hundred pounds, I could find the real will for you. You'd better close with me. To-day is the last chance. As soon as his lordship comes in, he'll hunt it up and destroy it."

I flourished it before him, and pointed with one hand to the broken desk, which he had not yet observed in his craven agitation.

"We do not need your aid," I answered. "We have found the will, ourselves. Thanks to Lady Georgina, it is safe till this minute."

"And to me," he put in, cringing, and trying, after his kind, to curry favour with the winners at the last moment. "It's all *my* doing, my lady! I wouldn't destroy it. His lordship offered me a hundred pounds more to break open the back of the desk at night, while your ladyship was asleep, and burn the thing quietly. But I told him he might do his own dirty work if he wanted it done. It wasn't good enough while your ladyship was here in possession. Besides, I wanted the right will preserved, for I thought things might turn up so; and I wouldn't stand by and see a gentleman like Mr. Tillington, as has always behaved well to me, deprived of his inheritance."

"Which is why you conspired with Lord Southminster to rob him of it, and to send him to prison for Higginson's crime," I interposed, calmly.

"Then you confess you put the forged will there?" Mr. Hayes said, getting to business.

White looked about him helplessly. He missed his headpiece, the instigator of the plot. "Well, it was like this, my lady," he began, turning to Lady Georgina, and wriggling to gain time. "You see, his lordship and Mr. Higginson——" he twirled his thumbs and tried to invent something plausible.

Lady Georgina swooped. "No rigmarole!" she said, sharply. "Do you confess you put it there or do you not—reptile?" Her vehemence startled him.

"Yes, I confess I put it there," he said at last, blinking. "As soon as the breath was out of Mr. Ashurst's body I put it there." He began to whimper. "I'm a poor man with a wife and family, sir," he went on, "though in Mr. Ashurst's time I always kept that quiet; and his lordship offered to pay me well for the job; and when you're paid well for a job yourself, sir——"

Mr. Hayes waved him off with one imperious hand. "Sit down in the corner there, man, and don't move or utter another word," he said, sternly, "until I order you. You will be in time still for me to produce at Bow Street."

Just at that moment, Lord Southminster swaggered back, accompanied by a couple of unwilling policemen. "Oh, I say," he cried, bursting in and staring around him, jubilant. "Look heah, Georgey, *are* you going quietly, or must I ask these coppahs to evict you?" He was wreathed in smiles now, and had evidently been fortifying himself with brandies and soda.

Lady Georgina rose in her wrath. "Yes, I'll go if you wish it, Bertie," she answered, with calm irony. "I'll leave the house as soon as you like—for the present—till we come back again with Harold and *his* policemen to evict you. This house is Harold's. Your game is played, boy." She spoke slowly. "We have found the other will—we have discovered Higginson's present address in Paris—and we know from White how he and you arranged this little conspiracy."

She rapped out each clause in this last accusing sentence with deliberate effect, like

to do without him. That fellah had squared it all up so neatly, don't yah know, that I thought there couldn't be any sort of hitch in the proceedings."

"You reckoned without Lois," Lady Georgina said, calmly.

"Ah, Miss Cayley—that's true. I mean, Mrs. Tillington. Yaas, yaas, I know, she's a doosid clevah person for a woman, now isn't she?"

It was impossible to take this flabby creature seriously, even as a criminal. Lady Georgina's lips relaxed. "Doosid clever" she admitted, looking at me almost tenderly.

"But not quite so clevah, don't yah know, as Higginson!"

"There you make your blooming little erraw," Mr. Hayes burst in, adopting one of Lord Southminster's favourite witticisms—the sort of witticism that improves, like poetry, by frequent repetition. "Policemen, you may go into the next room and wait: this is a family affair; we have no immediate need of you."

"Oh, certainly," Lord Southminster echoed, much relieved. "Very propah sentiment! Most undesirable that the constables should mix themselves up in a



"WELL, THIS IS A FAIR KNOCK-OUT," HE EJACULATED."

so many pistol-shots. Each bullet hit home. The pea-green young man, drawing back and staring, stroked his shadowy moustache with feeble fingers in undisguised astonishment. Then he dropped into a chair and fixed his gaze blankly on Lady Georgina. "Well, this is a fair knock-out," he ejaculated, fatuously disconcerted. "I wish Higginson was heah. I really don't quite know what

family mattah like this. Not the place for inferiahs!"

"Then why introduce them?" Lady Georgina burst out, turning on him.

He smiled his fatuous smile. "That's just what I say," he answered. "Why the jooce introduce them? But don't snap my head off!"

The policemen withdrew respectfully, glad

to be relieved of this unpleasant business, where they could gain no credit, and might possibly involve themselves in a charge of assault. Lord Southminster rose with a benevolent grin, and looked about him pleasantly. The brandies and soda had endowed him with irrepressible cheerfulness.

"Well?" Lady Georgina murmured.

"Well, I think I'll leave now, Georgey. You've trumped my ace, yah know. Nasty trick of White to go and round on a fellah. I don't like the turn this business is taking. Seems to me, the only way I have left to get out of it is—to turn Queen's evidence."

Lady Georgina planted herself firmly against the door. "Bertie," she cried, "no, you don't—not till we've got what we want out of you!"

He gazed at her blandly. His face broke once more into an imbecile smile. "You were always a rough 'un, Georgey. Your hand did sting! Well, what do you want now? We've each played our cards, and you needn't cut up rusty over it—especially when you're winning! Hang it all, I wish I had Higginson heah to tackle you!"

"If you go to see the Treasury people, or the Solicitor-General, or the Public Prosecutor, or whoever else it may be," Lady Georgina said, stoutly, "Mr. Hayes must go with you. We've trumped your ace, as you say, and we mean to take advantage of it. And then you must trundle yourself down to Bow Street afterwards, confess the whole truth, and set Harold at liberty."

"Oh, I say now, Georgey! The whole truth! the whole blooming truth! That's really what I call humiliating a fellah!"

"If you don't, we arrest you this minute—fourteen years' imprisonment!"

"Fourteen yeahs?" He wiped his forehead. "Oh, I say. How doosid uncomfortable. I was nevah much good at doing anything by the sweat of my brow. I ought to have lived in the Garden of Eden. Georgey, you're hard on a chap when he's down on his luck. It would be confounded cruel to send me to fourteen yeahs at Portland."

"You would have sent my husband to it," I broke in, angrily, confronting him.

"What? You too, Miss Cayley?—I mean Mrs. Tillington. Don't look at me like that. Tigahs aren't in it."

His jauntiness disarmed us. However wicked he might be, one felt it would be ridiculous to imprison this schoolboy. A sound flogging and a month's deprivation

of wine and cigarettes was the obvious punishment designed for him by nature.

"You must go down to the police-court and confess this whole conspiracy," Lady Georgina went on after a pause, as sternly as she was able. "I prefer, if we can, to save the family—even you, Bertie. But I can't any longer save the family honour—I can only save Harold's. You must help me to do that; and then, you must give me your solemn promise—in writing—to leave England for ever, and go to live in South Africa."

He stroked the invisible moustache more nervously than before. That penalty came home to him. "What, leave England for evah? Newmarket—Ascot—the club—the music-halls!"

"Or fourteen years' imprisonment!"

"Georgey, you spank as hard as evah!"

"Decide at once, or we arrest you!"

He glanced about him feebly. I could see he was longing for his lost confederate. "Well, I'll go," he said at last, sobering down; "and your solicitaw can trot round with me. I'll do all that you wish, though I call it most unfriendly. Hang it all, fourteen yeahs would be so beastly unpleasant!"

We drove forthwith to the proper authorities, who, on hearing the facts, at once arranged to accept Lord Southminster and White as Queen's evidence, neither being the actual forger. We also telegraphed to Paris to have Higginson arrested, Lord Southminster giving us up his assumed name with the utmost cheerfulness, and without one moment's compunction. Mr. Hayes was quite right: each conspirator was only too ready to save himself by betraying his fellows. Then we drove on to Bow Street (Lord Southminster consoling himself with a cigarette on the way), just in time for Harold's case, which was to be taken, by special arrangement, at 3.30.

A very few minutes sufficed to turn the tables completely on the conspirators. Harold was discharged, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of Higginson, the actual forger. He had drawn up the false will and signed it with Mr. Ashurst's name, after which he had presented it for Lord Southminster's approval. The pea-green young man told his tale with engaging frankness. "Bertie's a simple Simon," Lady Georgina commented to me; "but he's also a rogue; and Higginson saw his way to make excellent capital of him in both capacities—first use him as a catspaw, and then blackmail him."

On the steps of the police-court, as we emerged triumphant, Lord Southminster met us—still radiant as ever. He seemed wholly unaware of the depths of his iniquity: a fresh dose of brandy had restored his composure. "Look heah," he said, "Harold, your wife

tin and been a countess as well, aftah the governah's dead and gone, don't yah see. You'd have landed the double event. So you'd have pulled off a bettah thing for yourself in the end, as I said, if you'd laid your bottom dollah on me for winnah!"



"HAROLD, YOUR WIFE HAS BESTED ME."

has bested me! Jolly good thing for you that you managed to get hold of such a clevah woman! If you hadn't, deah boy, you'd have found yourself in Queeah Street! But, I say, Lois—I call yah Lois because you're my cousin now, yah know—you were backing the wrong man aftah all, as I told yah. For if you'd backed *me*, all this wouldn't have come out; you'd have got the

Higginson is now doing fourteen years at Portland; Harold and I are happy in the sweetest place in Gloucestershire; and Lord Southminster, blissfully unaware of the contempt with which the rest of the world regards him, is shooting big game among his "boys" in South Africa. Indeed, he bears so little malice that he sent us a present of a trophy of horns for our hall last winter.