THE PRIME MINISTER

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VOLUME I

CHAPTER I

Ferdinand Lopez

It is certainly of service to a man to know who were his grandfathers and who were his grandmothers if he entertain an ambition to move in the upper circles of society, and also of service to be able to speak of them as of persons who were themselves somebodies in their time. No doubt we all entertain great respect for those who by their own energies have raised themselves in the world; and when we hear that the son of a washerwoman has become Lord Chancellor or Archbishop of Canterbury we do, theoretically and abstractedly, feel a higher reverence for such self-made magnate than for one who has been as it were born into forensic or ecclesiastical purple. But not the less must the offspring of the washerwoman have had very much trouble on the subject of his birth, unless he has been, when young as well as when old, a very great man indeed. After the goal has been absolutely reached, and the honour and the titles and the wealth actually won, a man may talk with some humour, even with some affection, of the maternal tub;—but while the struggle is going on, with the conviction strong upon the struggler that he cannot be altogether successful unless he be esteemed a gentleman, not to be ashamed, not to conceal the old family circumstances, not at any rate to be silent, is difficult. And the difficulty is certainly not less if fortunate circumstances rather than hard work and intrinsic merit have raised above his natural place an aspirant to high social position. Can it be expected that such a one when dining with a duchess shall speak of his father's small shop, or bring into the light of day his grandfather's cobbler's awl? And yet it is difficult to be altogether silent! It may not be necessary

for any of us to be always talking of our own parentage. We may be generally reticent as to our uncles and aunts, and may drop even our brothers and sisters in our ordinary conversation. But if a man never mentions his belongings among those with whom he lives, he becomes mysterious, and almost open to suspicion. It begins to be known that nobody knows anything of such a man, and even friends become afraid. It is certainly convenient to be able to allude, if it be but once in a year, to some blood relation. Ferdinand Lopez, who in other respects had much in his circumstances on which to congratulate himself, suffered trouble in his mind respecting his ancestors such as I have endeavoured to describe. He did not know very much himself, but what little he did know he kept altogether to himself. He had no father or mother, no uncle, aunt, brother or sister, no cousin even whom he could mention in a cursory way to his dearest friend. He suffered, no doubt; —but with Spartan consistency he so hid his trouble from the world that no one knew that he suffered. Those with whom he lived, and who speculated often and wondered much as to who he was, never dreamed that the silent man's reticence was a burden to himself. At no special conjuncture of his life, at no period which could be marked with the finger of the observer, did he glaringly abstain from any statement which at the moment might be natural. He never hesitated, blushed, or palpably laboured at concealment; but the fact remained that though a great many men and not a few women knew Ferdinand Lopez very well, none of them knew whence he had come, or what was his family.

He was a man, however, naturally reticent, who never alluded to his own affairs unless in pursuit of some object the way to which was clear before his eyes. Silence therefore on a matter which is common in the mouths of most men was less difficult to him than to another, and the result less embarrassing. Dear old Jones, who tells his

friends at the club of every pound that he loses or wins at the races, who boasts of Mary's favours and mourns over Lucy's coldness almost in public, who issues bulletins on the state of his purse, his stomach, his stable, and his debts, could not with any amount of care keep from us the fact that his father was an attorney's clerk, and made his first money by discounting small bills. Everybody knows it, and Jones, who likes popularity, grieves at the unfortunate publicity. But Jones is relieved from a burden which would have broken his poor shoulders, and which even Ferdinand Lopez, who is a strong man, often finds it hard to bear without wincing.

It was admitted on all sides that Ferdinand Lopez was a "gentleman." Johnson says that any other derivation of this difficult word than that which causes it to signify "a man of ancestry" is whimsical. There are many, who in defining the term for their own use, still adhere to Johnson's dictum;—but they adhere to it with certain unexpressed allowances for possible exceptions. The chances are very much in favour of the well-born man, but exceptions may exist. It was not generally believed that Ferdinand Lopez was well born;—but he was a gentleman. And this most precious rank was acceded to him although he was employed,—or at least had been employed,—on business which does not of itself give such a warrant of position as is supposed to be afforded by the bar and the church, by the military services and by physic. He had been on the Stock Exchange, and still in some manner, not clearly understood by his friends, did business in the City.

At the time with which we are now concerned Ferdinand Lopez was thirty-three years old, and as he had begun life early he had been long before the world. It was known of him that he had been at a good English private school, and it was reported, on the solitary evidence of one who had there been his schoolfellow, that a rumour was current in the school that his school bills were paid by an old

gentleman who was not related to him. Thence at the age of seventeen he had been sent to a German University, and at the age of twenty-one had appeared in London, in a stockbroker's office, where he was soon known as an accomplished linguist, and as a very clever fellow,—precocious, not given to many pleasures, apt for work, but hardly trustworthy by employers, not as being dishonest, but as having a taste for being a master rather than a servant. Indeed his period of servitude was very short. It was not in his nature to be active on behalf of others. He was soon active for himself, and at one time it was supposed that he was making a fortune. Then it was known that he had left his regular business, and it was supposed that he had lost all that he had ever made or had ever possessed. But nobody, not even his own bankers or his own lawyer,—not even the old woman who looked after his linen,—ever really knew the state of his affairs.

He was certainly a handsome man,—his beauty being of a sort which men are apt to deny and women to admit lavishly. He was nearly six feet tall, very dark, and very thin, with regular, well-cut features indicating little to the physiognomist unless it be the great gift of self-possession. His hair was cut short, and he wore no beard beyond an absolutely black moustache. His teeth were perfect in form and whiteness,—a characteristic which, though it may be a valued item in a general catalogue of personal attraction, does not generally recommend a man to the unconscious judgment of his acquaintance. But about the mouth and chin of this man there was a something of softness, perhaps in the play of the lips, perhaps in the dimple, which in some degree lessened the feeling of hardness which was produced by the square brow and bold, unflinching, combative eyes. They who knew him and liked him were reconciled by the lower face. The greater number who knew him and did not like him felt and resented,—even though in nine cases out of ten they might express no

resentment even to themselves,—the pugnacity of his steady glance.

For he was essentially one of those men who are always, in the inner workings of their minds, defending themselves and attacking others. He could not give a penny to a woman at a crossing without a look which argued at full length her injustice in making her demand, and his freedom from all liability let him walk the crossing as often as he might. He could not seat himself in a railway carriage without a lesson to his opposite neighbour that in all the mutual affairs of travelling, arrangement of feet, disposition of bags, and opening of windows, it would be that neighbour's duty to submit and his to exact. It was, however, for the spirit rather than for the thing itself that he combatted. The woman with the broom got her penny. The opposite gentleman when once by a glance he had expressed submission was allowed his own way with his legs and with the window. I would not say that Ferdinand Lopez was prone to do ill-natured things; but he was imperious, and he had learned to carry his empire in his eye.

The reader must submit to be told one or two further and still smaller details respecting the man, and then the man shall be allowed to make his own way. No one of those around him knew how much care he took to dress himself well, or how careful he was that no one should know it. His very tailor regarded him as being simply extravagant in the number of his coats and trousers, and his friends looked upon him as one of those fortunate beings to whose nature belongs a facility of being well dressed, or almost an impossibility of being ill dressed. We all know the man,—a little man generally who moves seldom and softly,—who looks always as though he had just been sent home in a bandbox. Ferdinand Lopez was not a little man, and moved freely enough; but never, at any moment,—going into the city or coming out of it, on horseback or on foot, at home

over his book or after the mazes of the dance,—was he dressed otherwise than with perfect care. Money and time did it, but folk thought that it grew with him, as did his hair and his nails. And he always rode a horse which charmed good judges of what a park nag should be;—not a prancing, restless, giggling, sideway-going, useless garran, but an animal well made, well bitted, with perfect paces, on whom a rider if it pleased him could be as quiet as a statue on a monument. It often did please Ferdinand Lopez to be quiet on horseback; and yet he did not look like a statue, for it was acknowledged through all London that he was a good horseman. He lived luxuriously too,—though whether at his ease or not nobody knew,—for he kept a brougham of his own, and during the hunting season he had two horses down at Leighton. There had once been a belief abroad that he was ruined, but they who interest themselves in such matters had found out,—or at any rate believed that they had found out,—that he paid his tailor regularly: and now there prevailed an opinion that Ferdinand Lopez was a monied man.

It was known to some few that he occupied rooms in a flat at Westminster,—but to very few exactly where the rooms were situate. Among all his friends no one was known to have entered them. In a moderate way he was given to hospitality,—that is to infrequent but, when the occasion came, to graceful hospitality. Some club, however, or tavern, or perhaps, in the summer, some river bank would be chosen as the scene of these festivities. To a few,—if, as suggested, amidst summer flowers on the water's edge to men and women mixed,—he would be a courtly and efficient host; for he had the rare gift of doing such things well.

Hunting was over, and the east wind was still blowing, and a great portion of the London world was out of town taking its Easter holiday, when, on an unpleasant morning, Ferdinand Lopez travelled into the city by the Metropolitan

railway from Westminster Bridge. It was his custom to go thither when he did go,—not daily like a man of business, but as chance might require, like a capitalist or a man of pleasure,—in his own brougham. But on this occasion he walked down to the river side, and then walked from the Mansion House into a dingy little court called Little Tankard Yard, near the Bank of England, and going through a narrow dark long passage got into a little office at the back of a building, in which there sat at a desk a greasy gentleman with a new hat on one side of his head, who might perhaps be about forty years old. The place was very dark, and the man was turning over the leaves of a ledger. A stranger to city ways might probably have said that he was idle, but he was no doubt filling his mind with that erudition which would enable him to earn his bread. On the other side of the desk there was a little boy copying letters. These were Mr. Sextus Parker,—commonly called Sexty Parker,—and his clerk. Mr. Parker was a gentleman very well known and at the present moment favourably esteemed on the Stock Exchange. "What, Lopez!" said he. "Uncommon glad to see you. What can I do for you?"

"Just come inside,—will you?" said Lopez. Now within Mr. Parker's very small office there was a smaller office in which there were a safe, a small rickety Pembroke table, two chairs, and an old washing-stand with a tumbled towel. Lopez led the way into this sanctum as though he knew the place well, and Sexty Parker followed him.

"Beastly day, isn't it?" said Sexty.

"Yes,—a nasty east wind."

"Cutting one in two, with a hot sun at the same time. One ought to hybernate at this time of the year."

"Then why don't you hybernate?" said Lopez.

"Business is too good. That's about it. A man has to stick to it when it does come. Everybody can't do like you;—give up regular work, and make a better thing of an hour now and an hour then, just as it pleases you. I shouldn't dare go in

for that kind of thing."
"I don't suppose you or any one else know what I go in for," said Lopez, with a look that indicated offence.
"Nor don't care," said Sexty;—"only hope it's something good for your sake." Sexty Parker had known Mr. Lopez well, now for some years, and being an overbearing man himself,—somewhat even of a bully if the truth be spoken,—and by no means apt to give way unless hard pressed, had often tried his "hand" on his friend, as he himself would have said. But I doubt whether he could remember any instance in which he could congratulate himself on success. He was trying his hand again now, but did it with a faltering voice, having caught a glance of his friend's eye.
"I dare say not," said Lopez. Then he continued without changing his voice or the nature of the glance of his eye, "I'll tell you what I want you to do now. I want your name to this bill for three months."
Sexty Parker opened his mouth and his eyes, and took the bit of paper that was tendered to him. It was a promissory note for £750, which, if signed by him, would at the end of the specified period make him liable for that sum were it not otherwise paid. His friend Mr. Lopez was indeed applying to him for the assistance of his name in raising a loan to the amount of the sum named. This was a kind of favour which a man should ask almost on his knees,—and which, if so asked, Mr. Sextus Parker would certainly refuse. And here was Ferdinand Lopez asking it,—whom Sextus Parker had latterly regarded as an opulent man,—and asking it not at all on his knees, but, as one might say, at the muzzle of a pistol. "Accommodation bill!" said Sexty. "Why, you ain't hard up; are you?"
"I'm not going just at present to tell you much about my affairs, and yet I expect you to do what I ask you. I don't suppose you doubt my ability to raise £750."
"Oh, dear, no," said Sexty, who had been looked at and who had not borne the inspection well.

"And I don't suppose you would refuse me even if I were hard up, as you call it." There had been affairs before between the two men in which Lopez had probably been the stronger, and the memory of them, added to the inspection which was still going on, was heavy upon poor Sexty.
"Oh, dear, no;—I wasn't thinking of refusing. I suppose a fellow may be a little surprised at such a thing."
"I don't know why you need be surprised, as such things are very common. I happen to have taken a share in a loan a little beyond my immediate means, and therefore want a few hundreds. There is no one I can ask with a better grace than you. If you ain't—afraid about it, just sign it."
"Oh, I ain't afraid," said Sexty, taking his pen and writing his name across the bill. But even before the signature was finished, when his eye was taken away from the face of his companion and fixed upon the disagreeable piece of paper beneath his hand, he repented of what he was doing. He almost arrested his signature half-way. He did hesitate, but had not pluck enough to stop his hand. "It does seem to be a d––––d odd transaction all the same," he said as he leaned back in his chair.
"It's the commonest thing in the world," said Lopez picking up the bill in a leisurely way, folding it and putting it into his pocket-book. "Have our names never been together on a bit of paper before?"
"When we both had something to make by it."
"You've nothing to make and nothing to lose by this. Good day and many thanks;—though I don't think so much of the affair as you seem to do." Then Ferdinand Lopez took his departure and Sexty Parker was left alone in his bewilderment.
"By George,—that's queer," he said to himself. "Who'd have thought of Lopez being hard up for a few hundred pounds? But it must be all right. He wouldn't have come in that fashion, if it hadn't been all right. I oughtn't to have done it

though! A man ought never to do that kind of thing;—never,—never!" And Mr. Sextus Parker was much discontented with himself, so that when he got home that evening to the wife of his bosom and his little family at Ponders End, he by no means made himself agreeable to them. For that sum of £750 sat upon his bosom as he ate his supper, and lay upon his chest as he slept,—like a nightmare.

CHAPTER II

Everett Wharton

On that same day Lopez dined with his friend Everett Wharton at a new club called the Progress, of which they were both members. The Progress was certainly a new club, having as yet been open hardly more than three years; but still it was old enough to have seen many of the hopes of its early youth become dim with age and inaction. For the Progress had intended to do great things for the Liberal party,—or rather for political liberality in general,—and had in truth done little or nothing. It had been got up with considerable enthusiasm, and for a while certain fiery politicians had believed that through the instrumentality of this institution men of genius, and spirit, and natural power, but without wealth,—meaning always themselves,—would be supplied with sure seats in Parliament and a probable share in the Government. But no such results had been achieved. There had been a want of something,—some deficiency felt but not yet defined,—which had hitherto been fatal. The young men said it was because no old stager who knew the way of pulling the wires would come forward and put the club in the proper groove. The old men said it was because the young men were pretentious puppies. It was, however, not to be doubted that the party of Progress had become slack, and that the Liberal politicians of the country, although a special new club had been opened for the furtherance of their views, were not at present making much way. "What we want is organization," said one of the leading young men. But the organization was not as yet forthcoming.

The club, nevertheless, went on its way, like other clubs, and men dined and smoked and played billiards and pretended to read. Some few energetic members still

hoped that a good day would come in which their grand ideas might be realised,—but as regarded the members generally, they were content to eat and drink and play billiards. It was a fairly good club,—with a sprinkling of Liberal lordlings, a couple of dozen of members of Parliament who had been made to believe that they would neglect their party duties unless they paid their money, and the usual assortment of barristers, attorneys, city merchants and idle men. It was good enough at any rate for Ferdinand Lopez, who was particular about his dinner, and had an opinion of his own about wines. He had been heard to assert that, for real quiet comfort, there was not a club in London equal to it; but his hearers were not aware that in past days he had been blackballed at the T–––– and the G––––. These were accidents which Lopez had a gift of keeping in the background. His present companion, Everett Wharton, had, as well as himself, been an original member; —and Wharton had been one of those who had hoped to find in the club a stepping-stone to high political life, and who now talked often with idle energy of the need of organization.

"For myself," said Lopez, "I can conceive no vainer object of ambition than a seat in the British Parliament. What does any man gain by it? The few who are successful work very hard for little pay and no thanks,—or nearly equally hard for no pay and as little thanks. The many who fail sit idly for hours, undergoing the weary task of listening to platitudes, and enjoy in return the now absolutely valueless privilege of having M.P. written on their letters."

"Somebody must make laws for the country."

"I don't see the necessity. I think the country would do uncommonly well if it were to know that no old law would be altered or new law made for the next twenty years."

"You wouldn't have repealed the corn laws?"

"There are no corn laws to repeal now."

"Nor modify the income tax?"

"I would modify nothing. But at any rate, whether laws are to be altered or to be left, it is a comfort to me that I need not put my finger into that pie. There is one benefit indeed in being in the House."
"You can't be arrested."
"Well;—that, as far as it goes; and one other. It assists a man in getting a seat as the director of certain Companies. People are still such asses that they trust a Board of Directors made up of members of Parliament, and therefore of course members are made welcome. But if you want to get into the House why don't you arrange it with your father, instead of waiting for what the club may do for you?"
"My father wouldn't pay a shilling for such a purpose. He was never in the House himself."
"And therefore despises it."
"A little of that, perhaps. No man ever worked harder than he did, or, in his way, more successfully; and having seen one after another of his juniors become members of Parliament, while he stuck to the attorneys, there is perhaps a little jealousy about it."
"From what I see of the way you live at home, I should think your father would do anything for you,—with proper management. There is no doubt, I suppose, that he could afford it?"
"My father never in his life said anything to me about his own money affairs, though he says a great deal about mine. No man ever was closer than my father. But I believe that he could afford almost anything."
"I wish I had such a father," said Ferdinand Lopez. "I think that I should succeed in ascertaining the extent of his capabilities, and in making some use of them too."
Wharton nearly asked his friend,—almost summoned courage to ask him,—whether his father had done much for him. They were very intimate; and on one subject, in which Lopez was much interested, their confidence had been very

close. But the younger and the weaker man of the two could not quite bring himself to the point of making an inquiry which he thought would be disagreeable. Lopez had never before, in all their intercourse, hinted at the possibility of his having or having had filial aspirations. He had been as though he had been created self-sufficient, independent of mother's milk or father's money. Now the question might have been asked almost naturally. But it was not asked.

Everett Wharton was a trouble to his father,—but not an agonizing trouble, as are some sons. His faults were not of a nature to rob his father's cup of all its sweetness and to bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Old Wharton had never had to ask himself whether he should now, at length, let his son fall into the lowest abysses, or whether he should yet again struggle to put him on his legs, again forgive him, again pay his debts, again endeavour to forget dishonour, and place it all to the score of thoughtless youth. Had it been so, I think that, if not on the first or second fall, certainly on the third, the young man would have gone into the abyss; for Mr. Wharton was a stern man, and capable of coming to a clear conclusion on things that were nearest and even dearest to himself. But Everett Wharton had simply shown himself to be inefficient to earn his own bread. He had never declined even to do this,—but had simply been inefficient. He had not declared either by words or actions that as his father was a rich man, and as he was an only son, he would therefore do nothing. But he had tried his hand thrice, and in each case, after but short trial, had assured his father and his friends that the thing had not suited him. Leaving Oxford without a degree,—for the reading of the schools did not suit him,—he had gone into a banking-house, by no means as a mere clerk, but with an expressed proposition from his father, backed by the assent of a partner, that he should work his way up to wealth and a great commercial position. But six months

taught him that banking was "an abomination," and he at once went into a course of reading with a barrister. He remained at this till he was called,—for a man may be called with very little continuous work. But after he was called the solitude of his chambers was too much for him, and at twenty-five he found that the Stock Exchange was the mart in the world for such talents and energies as he possessed. What was the nature of his failure during the year that he went into the city, was known only to himself and his father,—unless Ferdinand Lopez knew something of it also. But at six-and-twenty the Stock Exchange was also abandoned; and now, at eight-and-twenty, Everett Wharton had discovered that a parliamentary career was that for which nature and his special genius had intended him. He had probably suggested this to his father, and had met with some cold rebuff.

Everett Wharton was a good-looking, manly fellow, six feet high, with broad shoulders, with light hair, wearing a large silky bushy beard, which made him look older than his years, who neither by his speech nor by his appearance would ever be taken for a fool, but who showed by the very actions of his body as well as by the play of his face, that he lacked firmness of purpose. He certainly was no fool. He had read much, and, though he generally forgot what he read, there were left with him from his readings certain nebulous lights, begotten by other men's thinking, which enabled him to talk on most subjects. It cannot be said of him that he did much thinking for himself;—but he thought that he thought. He believed of himself that he had gone rather deep into politics, and that he was entitled to call many statesmen asses because they did not see the things which he saw. He had the great question of labour, and all that refers to unions, strikes, and lock-outs, quite at his fingers' ends. He knew how the Church of England should be disestablished and recomposed. He was quite clear on questions of finance, and saw to a "t" how progress should

be made towards communism, so that no violence should disturb that progress, and that in the due course of centuries all desire for personal property should be conquered and annihilated by a philanthropy so general as hardly to be accounted a virtue. In the meantime he could never contrive to pay his tailor's bill regularly out of the allowance of £400 a year which his father made him, and was always dreaming of the comforts of a handsome income.

He was a popular man certainly,—very popular with women, to whom he was always courteous, and generally liked by men, to whom he was genial and good-natured. Though he was not himself aware of the fact, he was very dear to his father, who in his own silent way almost admired and certainly liked the openness and guileless freedom of a character which was very opposite to his own. The father, though he had never said a word to flatter the son, did in truth give his offspring credit for greater talent than he possessed, and, even when appearing to scorn them, would listen to the young man's diatribes almost with satisfaction. And Everett was very dear also to a sister, who was the only other living member of this branch of the Wharton family. Much will be said of her in these pages, and it is hoped that the reader may take an interest in her fate. But here, in speaking of the brother, it may suffice to say, that the sister, who was endowed with infinitely finer gifts than his, did give credit to the somewhat pretentious claims of her less noble brother.

Indeed it had been perhaps a misfortune with Everett Wharton that some people had believed in him,—and a further misfortune that some others had thought it worth their while to pretend to believe in him. Among the latter might probably be reckoned the friend with whom he was now dining at the Progress. A man may flatter another, as Lopez occasionally did flatter Wharton, without preconcerted falsehood. It suits one man to be well with

another, and the one learns gradually and perhaps unconsciously the way to take advantage of the foibles of the other. Now it was most material to Lopez that he should stand well with all the members of the Wharton family, as he aspired to the hand of the daughter of the house. Of her regard he had already thought himself nearly sure. Of the father's sanction to such a marriage he had reason to be almost more than doubtful. But the brother was his friend,—and in such circumstances a man is almost justified in flattering a brother.

"I'll tell you what it is, Lopez," said Wharton, as they strolled out of the club together, a little after ten o'clock, "the men of the present day won't give themselves the trouble to occupy their minds with matters which have, or should have, real interest. Pope knew all about it when he said that 'The proper study of mankind is man.' But people don't read Pope now, or if they do they don't take the trouble to understand him."

"Men are too busy making money, my dear fellow."

"That's just it. Money's a very nice thing."

"Very nice," said Lopez.

"But the search after it is debasing. If a man could make money for four, or six, or even eight hours a day, and then wash his mind of the pursuit, as a clerk in an office washes the copies and ledgers out of his mind, then—"

"He would never make money in that way,—and keep it."

"And therefore the whole thing is debasing. A man ceases to care for the great interests of the world, or even to be aware of their existence, when his whole soul is in Spanish bonds. They wanted to make a banker of me, but I found that it would kill me."

"It would kill me, I think, if I had to confine myself to Spanish bonds."

"You know what I mean. You at any rate can understand me, though I fear you are too far gone to abandon the idea of making a fortune."

"I would abandon it to-morrow if I could come into a fortune ready made. A man must at any rate eat."
"Yes;—he must eat. But I am not quite sure," said Wharton thoughtfully, "that he need think about what he eats."
"Unless the beef is sent up without horse radish!" It had happened that when the two men sat down to their dinner the insufficient quantity of that vegetable supplied by the steward of the club had been all consumed, and Wharton had complained of the grievance.
"A man has a right to that for which he has paid," said Wharton, with mock solemnity, "and if he passes over laches of that nature without observation he does an injury to humanity at large. I'm not going to be caught in a trap, you know, because I like horse radish with my beef. Well, I can't go farther out of my way, as I have a deal of reading to do before I court my Morpheus. If you'll take my advice you'll go straight to the governor. Whatever Emily may feel I don't think she'll say much to encourage you unless you go about it after that fashion. She has prim notions of her own, which perhaps are not after all so much amiss when a man wants to marry a girl."
"God forbid that I should think that anything about your sister was amiss!"
"I don't think there is much myself. Women are generally superficial,—but some are honestly superficial and some dishonestly. Emily at any rate is honest."
"Stop half a moment." Then they sauntered arm in arm down the broad pavement leading from Pall Mall to the Duke of York's column. "I wish I could make out your father more clearly. He is always civil to me, but he has a cold way of looking at me which makes me think I am not in his good books."
"He is like that to everybody."
"I never seem to get beyond the skin with him. You must have heard him speak of me in my absence?"
"He never says very much about anybody."

"But a word would let me know how the land lies. You know me well enough to be aware that I am the last man to be curious as to what others think of me. Indeed I do not care about it as much as a man should do. I am utterly indifferent to the opinion of the world at large, and would never object to the company of a pleasant person because the pleasant person abused me behind my back. What I value is the pleasantness of the man and not his liking or disliking for myself. But here the dearest aim of my life is concerned, and I might be guided either this way or that, to my great advantage, by knowing whether I stand well or ill with him."
"You have dined three times within the last three months in Manchester Square, and I don't know any other man,—certainly no other young man,—who has had such strong proof of intimacy from my father."
"Yes, and I know my advantages. But I have been there as your friend, not as his."
"He doesn't care twopence about my friends. I wanted to give Charlie Skate a dinner, but my father wouldn't have him at any price."
"Charlie Skate is out at elbows, and bets at billiards. I am respectable,—or at any rate your father thinks so. Your father is more anxious about you than you are aware of, and wishes to make his house pleasant to you as long as he can do so to your advantage. As far as you are concerned he rather approves of me, fancying that my turn for making money is stronger than my turn for spending it. Nevertheless, he looks upon me as a friend of yours rather than his own. Though he has given me three dinners in three months,—and I own the greatness of his hospitality,—I don't suppose he ever said a word in my favour. I wish I knew what he does say."
"He says he knows nothing about you."
"Oh;—that's it, is it? Then he can know no harm. When next he says so ask him of how many of the men who dine at his

house he can say as much. Good night;—I won't keep you any longer. But I can tell you this;—if between us we can manage to handle him rightly, you may get your seat in Parliament and I may get my wife;—that is, of course, if she will have me."

Then they parted, but Lopez remained in the pathway, walking up and down by the side of the old military club, thinking of things. He certainly knew his friend, the younger Wharton, intimately, appreciating the man's good qualities, and being fully aware of the man's weakness. By his questions he had extracted quite enough to assure himself that Emily's father would be adverse to his proposition. He had not felt much doubt before, but now he was certain. "He doesn't know much about me," he said, musing to himself. "Well, no; he doesn't;—and there isn't very much that I can tell him. Of course he's wise,—as wisdom goes. But then, wise men do do foolish things at intervals. The discreetest of city bankers are talked out of their money; the most scrupulous of matrons are talked out of their virtue; the most experienced of statesmen are talked out of their principles. And who can really calculate chances? Men who lead forlorn hopes generally push through without being wounded;—and the fifth or sixth heir comes to a title." So much he said, palpably, though to himself, with his inner voice. Then,—impalpably, with no even inner voice,—he asked himself what chance he might have of prevailing with the girl herself; and he almost ventured to tell himself that in that direction he need not despair.

In very truth he loved the girl and reverenced her, believing her to be better and higher and nobler than other human beings,—as a man does when he is in love; and so believing, he had those doubts as to his own success which such reverence produces.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Abel Wharton, Q.C.

Lopez was not a man to let grass grow under his feet when he had anything to do. When he was tired of walking backwards and forwards over the same bit of pavement, subject all the while to a cold east wind, he went home and thought of the same matter while he lay in bed. Even were he to get the girl's assurances of love, without the father's consent he might find himself farther from his object than ever. Mr. Wharton was a man of old fashions, who would think himself ill-used and his daughter ill-used, and who would think also that a general offence would have been committed against good social manners, if his daughter were to be asked for her hand without his previous consent. Should he absolutely refuse,—why then the battle, though it would be a desperate battle, might perhaps be fought with other strategy; but, giving to the matter his best consideration, Lopez thought it expedient to go at once to the father. In doing this he would have no silly tremors. Whatever he might feel in speaking to the girl, he had sufficient self-confidence to be able to ask the father, if not with assurance, at any rate without trepidation. It was, he thought, probable that the father, at the first attack, would neither altogether accede, or altogether refuse. The disposition of the man was averse to the probability of an absolute reply at the first moment. The lover imagined that it might be possible for him to take advantage of the period of doubt which would thus be created.

Mr. Wharton was and had for a great many years been a barrister practising in the Equity Courts,—or rather in one Equity Court, for throughout a life's work now extending to nearly fifty years, he had hardly ever gone out of the single Vice-Chancellor's Court which was much better known by

Mr. Wharton's name than by that of the less eminent judge who now sat there. His had been a very peculiar, a very toilsome, but yet probably a very satisfactory life. He had begun his practice early, and had worked in a stuff gown till he was nearly sixty. At that time he had amassed a large fortune, mainly from his profession, but partly also by the careful use of his own small patrimony and by his wife's money. Men knew that he was rich, but no one knew the extent of his wealth. When he submitted to take a silk gown, he declared among his friends that he did so as a step preparatory to his retirement. The altered method of work would not suit him at his age, nor,—as he said,—would it be profitable. He would take his silk as an honour for his declining years, so that he might become a bencher at his Inn. But he had now been working for the last twelve or fourteen years with his silk gown,—almost as hard as in younger days, and with pecuniary results almost as serviceable; and though from month to month he declared his intention of taking no fresh briefs, and though he did now occasionally refuse work, still he was there with his mind as clear as ever, and with his body apparently as little affected by fatigue.

Mr. Wharton had not married till he was forty, and his wife had now been two years dead. He had had six children,—of whom but two were now left to make a household for his old age. He had been nearly fifty when his youngest daughter was born, and was therefore now an old father of a young child. But he was one of those men who, as in youth they are never very young, so in age are they never very old. He could still ride his cob in the park jauntily; and did so carefully every morning in his life, after an early cup of tea and before his breakfast. And he could walk home from his chambers every day, and on Sundays could do the round of the parks on foot. Twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, he dined at that old law club, the Eldon, and played whist after dinner till twelve o'clock. This was the

great dissipation and, I think, the chief charm of his life. In the middle of August he and his daughter usually went for a month to Wharton Hall in Herefordshire, the seat of his cousin Sir Alured Wharton;—and this was the one duty of his life which was a burthen to him. But he had been made to believe that it was essential to his health, and to his wife's, and then to his girl's health, that he should every summer leave town for a time,—and where else was he to go? Sir Alured was a relation and a gentleman. Emily liked Wharton Hall. It was the proper thing. He hated Wharton Hall, but then he did not know any place out of London that he would not hate worse. He had once been induced to go up the Rhine, but had never repeated the experiment of foreign travel. Emily sometimes went abroad with her cousins, during which periods it was supposed that the old lawyer spent a good deal of his time at the Eldon. He was a spare, thin, strongly made man, with spare light brown hair, hardly yet grizzled, with small grey whiskers, clear eyes, bushy eyebrows, with a long ugly nose, on which young barristers had been heard to declare that you might hang a small kettle, and with considerable vehemence of talk when he was opposed in argument. For, with all his well-known coolness of temper, Mr. Wharton could become very hot in an argument, when the nature of the case in hand required heat. On one subject all who knew him were agreed. He was a thorough lawyer. Many doubted his eloquence, and some declared that he had known well the extent of his own powers in abstaining from seeking the higher honours of his profession; but no one doubted his law. He had once written a book,—on the mortgage of stocks in trade; but that had been in early life, and he had never since dabbled in literature.

He was certainly a man of whom men were generally afraid. At the whist-table no one would venture to scold him. In the court no one ever contradicted him. In his own house, though he was very quiet, the servants dreaded to

offend him, and were attentive to his slightest behests. When he condescended to ride with any acquaintance in the park, it was always acknowledged that old Wharton was to regulate the pace. His name was Abel, and all his life he had been known as able Abe;—a silent, far-seeing, close-fisted, just old man, who was not, however, by any means deficient in sympathy either with the sufferings or with the joys of humanity.

It was Easter time and the courts were not sitting, but Mr. Wharton was in his chamber as a matter of course at ten o'clock. He knew no real homely comforts elsewhere,—unless at the whist-table at the Eldon. He ate and drank and slept in his own house in Manchester Square, but he could hardly be said to live there. It was not there that his mind was awake, and that the powers of the man were exercised. When he came up from the dining-room to join his daughter after dinner he would get her to sing him a song, and would then seat himself with a book. But he never read in his own house, invariably falling into a sweet and placid slumber, from which he was never disturbed till his daughter kissed him as she went to bed. Then he would walk about the room, and look at his watch, and shuffle uneasily through half-an-hour till his conscience allowed him to take himself to his chamber. He was a man of no pursuits in his own house. But from ten in the morning till five, or often till six, in the evening, his mind was active in some work. It was not now all law, as it used to be. In the drawer of the old piece of furniture which stood just at the right hand of his own arm-chair there were various books hidden away, which he was sometimes ashamed to have seen by his clients,—poetry and novels and even fairy tales. For there was nothing Mr. Wharton could not read in his chambers, though there was nothing that he could read in his own house. He had a large pleasant room in which to sit, looking out from the ground floor of Stone Buildings on to the gardens belonging to the Inn,—and here, in the