

exacting of all creditors. "Let me understand clearly. Are you my agent for the receipt of rents, or are we partners in some bankrupt swindling concern which can only keep going by my making myself the slave of a village money-lender, and betraying the obligations of rank and honor even more basely than I have mismanaged my property? If that is your view, don't you think it would be a simpler and more straightforward transaction if you proposed that we should chloroform Humphrey Dargan and rob his safe, and destroy the mortgage deed? Or what the devil is your view, if you're not mad yourself, or if you don't want to drive me mad?"

"My view is," said the agent, unflinchingly, "that if your lordship is not able to pay three gales of interest in gold, and if Humphrey Dargan is fool enough to accept them in smiles and handshakes, he ought to get them. And that your lordship may be in possession of my entire view, my view is that, unless you are prepared to pay him in one sort of coin or in the other, Dargan is the sort of man who is less capable of forgiving an injury than of forgiving a debt, and is capable of proceeding to any length when it is a question of satisfying an injury and a debt together."

"Have you anything else to add in the way of insolence?"

"I have nothing to add to the candid expression of opinion to which my duty and your lordship's invitation have driven me except this—that if Humphrey Dargan is rejected at the Club by reason of your lordship turning down your thumbs, he is quite capable of filing a petition for sale of the estate—a petition which I don't see how we are to resist, if, as I suspect, Hugg and he understand one another—and I hope it is not necessary to remind your lordship how many years' purchase an Irish landed property is likely to fetch at this moment in a district which is a Fenian hotbed, and with a drawing of Quish's coffin prefixed to the rental." Whether it was that his vanity and Lord Drumshaughlin's preternatural stillness for the moment deluded so shrewd a man as Hans Harman into the belief that he had conquered; whether he thought he could see his way to new financial combinations founded upon an accommodation between the moneylender and Lord Drumshaughlin; or whether he was of set purpose arousing in the latter a temper which he knew would make an accommodation impossible—it is certain that he spoke with a boldness of glance which astonished Lord Drumshaughlin almost as much as his hardihood of speech.

Lord Drumshaughlin was silent for an instant. Every sentence of the agent's had wounded him as excruciatingly as a heavy boot trampling upon his chalky great-toe; but he felt that the occasion demanded something worthier than one of his ordinary flights of gouty fury. He took two or three strides up and down, as if struggling with the choler that was rising in him like the reek of a limekiln. All at once he faced the agent, and said: "Harman, you are an old servant, or I dare say you are aware I should have sent you through the window for half the insolence you have just uttered."

"Too old to take your lordship seriously in pleasantries of this sort," said the agent, with a bow.

"Yes, but, by God! not old enough to have learned that I don't pay an agent to beard me in my own house with his two-penny-ha'penny sarcasms," roared Lord Drumshaughlin, boiling over. "Now listen. I have dealt with this fellow for money, as I have dealt with him for groceries, paying him the full market value of his commodities. You tell me that on the strength of that transaction he has a right to wriggle himself into this house as a joint master—to assert a co-partnership with me in my property and rank—to command me body and soul. You tell me that there is no escape from him—that he has me tethered with bonds and parchments from which there is no deliverance. You go further, and suggest that, in order to make better terms for myself with this Caliban in my own ignominious bondage, I should enable him to subject every man of birth and spirit to the same degrading necessity I am under myself of accepting him as an associate and an equal. Now listen—I will be driven out of this house by the sheriff first—I will put a bullet through my head first, if that should be the last luxury I can allow myself. Things have reached a pretty pass when a Westropp of Drumshaughlin is obliged to make it clear that he

does not intend to turn pander to the ambitions of a vile gonabeen-man and his wife. His letter and your own words here to-day warn me that I have fallen to that depth of suspicion. I ask pardon," he said with some dignity, "in so far as any ignorance or folly of mine in money-matters may have encouraged the belief that I had so far forgotten all that makes life endurable to a man of honor; but I trust it will never again be necessary to repeat to Mr. Dargan or to you that the relation between us is one strictly defined by the deed of mortgage, and that that relation leaves me for the present, at all events, the master of my own property and the guardian of my own honor. I will not support him for the Club—do you hear, Harman? I will throw in a black bean myself. I will canvass against him, if it is possible that so scurvy a creature can have the smallest chance of bribing himself into the society of gentlemen. If you are right in supposing that nothing but a sale can deliver me from this man's claws, there can be little regret about parting with a position which I could only hold as Humphrey Dargan's stipendiary and bear-leader. But I have yet to learn that an Irish landed estate has become so out-at-elbows a property that a man with a rental of seven thousand a year has no alternative but to remain all his lifetime the bond-slave of a damned rustic usurer for a debt of fifty-five thousand; and, Harman, if your experience can give me no better suggestion in that direction than one that might have been offered to a disreputable gambler by his disreputable pal, I shall only have to look elsewhere for assistance." And Lord Drumshaughlin bounced out of the room, banging the door with a violence that seemed to make the very walls of the Castle shake with indignation.

Mr. Hans Harman smiled, and proceeded to make a call in connection with the canvass for his nominee. He knew his principal well enough to make sure that, once his explosion of dignity had come off to his satisfaction, Lord Drumshaughlin would either forget the matter wholly, or soar into some other airy scheme of financial castle-building, and ask Humphrey Dargan to dine with him and discuss it. If this should be the issue, the agent saw his way to a further exploitation of the money-lender's vanities and Lord Drumshaughlin's necessities on his own account, without exposing the affairs of the estate to the prying eyes of the Landed Estates Court. If, on the other hand, Lord Drumshaughlin's pig-headed arrogance should go on gathering to the point of open rupture, he was prepared for that eventuality also. So Frank Harman's pony-chaise continued to circulate from one house of county gentility to another; and various mysterious presents of poultry and preserves (the happy thought of that princess of diplomats, Mrs. Dargan) followed in her wake; and Harman dug every necessitous half-pay officer on the club register under the ribs with confidential geniality; and the general tone of such club conversation as was permitted to interrupt the knocking of billiard-balls and the absorption of whisky-and-water was that, if Lord Drumshaughlin was determined that they should have his company on the Bench whether they liked or no, there could be no great harm in introducing his purse into their society also, as the most tolerable part of him. "He'll do as well as another to lose to me at half-crown whist," grinned old Major Grogan, to whose purple nose the ace and knave were understood to contribute more nourishment than her Majesty's pension list did. "A fellow who knows he has nothing but his purse to pay his way with is no more embarrassing in society than the waiter who moves about with iced champagne," was the judicial verdict of a scorbatic young gentleman who, on the strength of having once dined in a cabinet particulier of the Cafe Royal and finished up after the Alhambra in a Leicester Square oyster-room with a cousin in the Guards who was invited to Marlborough House, passed for a man of fashion among the honest, pudding-headed, golden youth of Drumshaughlin—odd-looking, innocent Minotaurs, with the heads of scarlet-cheeked young bulls and the gaiters of grooms in full-dress.

(To be continued.)

"Soft, fresh linen is no less important than its fineness"; use "NO-RUBBING" Laundry help to keep it so; also, "Golden Rule" Soap.

Auckland Readers Note!

J. R. CUNNINGHAME, M.P.S., "THE PRESCRIPTION CHEMIST," has opened an Up-to-Date Pharmacy. GIVE HIM YOUR SUPPORT.