

CHAPTER XVII

GEOFFREY WINS HIS CASE

Before ten o'clock on the following morning, having already spent two hours over his brief, that he had now thoroughly mastered, Geoffrey was at his chambers, which he had some difficulty in reaching owing to the thick fog that still hung over London, and indeed all England.

To his surprise nothing had been heard either of the Attorney-General or of Mr. Candleton. The solicitors were in despair; but he consoled them by saying that one or the other was sure to turn up in time, and that a few words would suffice to explain the additional light which had been thrown on the case. He occupied his half hour, however, in making a few rough notes to guide him in the altogether improbable event of his being called on to open, and then went into court. The case was first on the list, and there were a good many counsel engaged on the other side. Just as the judge took his seat, the solicitor, with an expression of dismay, handed Geoffrey a telegram which had that moment arrived from Mr. Candleton. It was dated from Calais on the previous night, and ran, "Am unable to cross on account of thick fog. You had better get somebody else in Parsons and Douse."

"And we haven't got another brief prepared," said the agonised solicitor. "What is more, I can hear nothing of the Attorney-General, and his clerk does not seem to know where he is. You must ask for an

adjournment, Mr. Bingham; you can't manage the case alone."

"Very well," said Geoffrey, and on the case being called he rose and stated the circumstances to the court. But the Court was crusty. It had got the fog down its throat, and altogether It didn't seem to see it. Moreover the other side, marking its advantage, objected strongly. The witnesses, brought at great expense, were there; his Lordship was there, the jury was there; if this case was not taken there was no other with which they could go on, &c., &c.

The court took the same view, and lectured Geoffrey severely. Every counsel in a case, the Court remembered, when It was at the Bar, used to be able to open that case at a moment's notice, and though things had, It implied, no doubt deteriorated to a considerable extent since those palmy days, every counsel ought still to be prepared to do so on emergency.

Of course, however, if he, Geoffrey, told the court that he was absolutely unprepared to go on with the case, It would have no option but to grant an adjournment.

"I am perfectly prepared to go on with it, my lord," Geoffrey interposed calmly.

"Very well," said the Court in a mollified tone, "then go on! I have no doubt that the learned Attorney-General will arrive presently."

Then, as is not unusual in a probate suit, followed an argument as to who should open it, the plaintiff or the defendant. Geoffrey claimed that this right clearly lay with him, and the opposing counsel raised no great objection, thinking that they would do well to leave the opening in the hands of a rather inexperienced man, who would very likely work his side more harm than good. So, somewhat to the horror of the solicitors, who thought with longing of the eloquence of the Attorney-General, and the unrivalled experience and finesse of Mr. Candleton, Geoffrey was called upon to open the case for the defendants, propounding the first will.

He rose without fear or hesitation, and with but one prayer in his heart, that no untimely Attorney-General would put in an appearance. He had got his chance, the chance for which many able men have to wait long years, and he knew it, and meant to make the most of it. Naturally a brilliant speaker, Geoffrey was not, as so many good speakers are, subject to fits of nervousness, and he was, moreover, thoroughly master of his case. In five minutes judge, jury and counsel were all listening to him with attention; in ten they were absorbed in the lucid and succinct statement of the facts which he was unfolding to them. His ghost theory was at first received with a smile, but presently counsel on the other side ceased to smile, and began to look uneasy. If he could prove what he said, there was an end of their case. When he had been speaking for about forty minutes one of the opposing counsel interrupted him with some remark, and at that moment he noticed that the

Attorney-General's clerk was talking to the solicitor beneath him.

"Bother it, he is coming," thought Geoffrey.

But no, the solicitor bending forward informed him that the Attorney-General had been unavoidably detained by some important Government matter, and had returned his brief.

"Well, we must get on as we can," Geoffrey said.

"If you continue like that we shall get on very well," whispered the solicitors, and then Geoffrey knew that he was doing well.

"Yes, Mr. Bingham!" said his Lordship.

Then Geoffrey went on with his statement.

At lunch time it was a question whether another leader should be briefed. Geoffrey said that so far as he was concerned he could get on alone. He knew every point of the case, and he had got a friend to "take a note" for him while he was speaking.

After some hesitation the solicitors decided not to brief fresh counsel at this stage of the case, but to leave it entirely in his hands.

It would be useless to follow the details of this remarkable will suit,

which lasted two days, and attracted much attention. Geoffrey won it and won it triumphantly. His address to the jury on the whole case was long remembered in the courts, rising as it did to a very high level of forensic eloquence. Few who saw it ever forgot the sight of his handsome face and commanding presence as he crushed the case of his opponents like an eggshell, and then with calm and overwhelming force denounced the woman who with her lover had concocted the cruel plot that robbed her uncle of life and her cousins of their property, till at the last, pointing towards her with outstretched hand, he branded her to the jury as a murderess.

Few in that crowded court have forgotten the tragic scene that followed, when the trembling woman, worn out by the long anxiety of the trial, and utterly unnerved by her accuser's brilliant invective, rose from her seat and cried:

"We did it--it is true that we did it to get the money, but we did not mean to frighten him to death," and then fell fainting to the ground--or Geoffrey Bingham's quiet words as he sat down:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I do not think it necessary to carry my case any further."

There was no applause, the occasion was too dramatically solemn, but the impression made both upon the court and the outside public, to whom such a scene is peculiarly fitted to appeal, was deep and lasting.

Geoffrey himself was under little delusion about the matter. He had no conceit in his composition, but neither had he any false modesty. He merely accepted the situation as really powerful men do accept such events--with thankfulness, but without surprise. He had got his chance at last, and like any other able man, whatever his walk of life, he had risen to it. That was all. Most men get such chances in some shape or form, and are unable to avail themselves of them. Geoffrey was one of the exceptions; as Beatrice had said, he was born to succeed. As he sat down, he knew that he was a made man.

And yet while he walked home that night, his ears still full of the congratulations which had rained in on him from every quarter, he was conscious of a certain pride. He will have felt as Geoffrey felt that night, whose lot it has been to fight long and strenuously against circumstances so adverse as to be almost overwhelming, knowing in his heart that he was born to lead and not to follow; and who at last, by one mental effort, with no friendly hand to help, and no friendly voice to guide, has succeeded in bursting a road through the difficulties which hemmed him in, and has suddenly found himself, not above competition indeed, but still able to meet it. He will not have been too proud of that endeavour; it will have seemed but a little thing to him--a thing full of faults and imperfections, and falling far short of his ideal. He will not even have attached a great importance to his success, because, if he is a person of this calibre, he must remember how small it is, when all is said and done; that even in his day there

are those who can beat him on his own ground; and also that all worldly success, like the most perfect flower, yet bears in it the elements of decay. But he will have reflected with humble satisfaction on those long years of patient striving which have at length lifted him to an eminence whence he can climb on and on, scarcely encumbered by the jostling crowd; till at length, worn out, the time comes for him to fall.

So Geoffrey thought and felt. The thing was to be done, and he had done it. Honoria should have money now; she should no longer be able to twit him with their poverty. Yes, and a better thought still, Beatrice would be glad to hear of his little triumph.

He reached home rather late. Honoria was going out to dinner with a distinguished cousin, and was already dressing. Geoffrey had declined the invitation, which was a short one, because he had not expected to be back from chambers. In this enthusiasm, however, he went to his wife's room to tell her of the event.

"Well," she said, "what have you been doing? I think that you might have arranged to come out with me. My going out so much by myself does not look well. Oh, I forgot; of course you are in that case."

"Yes--that is, I was. I have won the case. Here is a very fair report of it in the St. James's Gazette if you care to read it."

"Good heavens, Geoffrey! How can you expect me to read all that stuff

when I am dressing?"

"I don't expect you to, Honoria; only, as I say, I have won the case, and I shall get plenty of work now."

"Will you? I am glad to hear it; perhaps we shall be able to escape from this horrid flat if you do. There, Anne! Je vous l'ai toujours dit, cette robe ne me va pas bien."

"Mais, milady, la robe va parfaitement----"

"That is your opinion," grumbled Lady Honoria. "Well, it isn't mine. But it will have to do. Good-night, Geoffrey; I daresay that you will have gone to bed when I get back," and she was gone.

Geoffrey picked up his St. James's Gazette with a sigh. He felt hurt, and knew that he was a fool for his pains. Lady Honoria was not a sympathetic person; it was not fair to expect it from her. Still he felt hurt. He went upstairs and heard Effie her prayers.

"Where has you beed, daddy?--to the Smoky Town?" The Temple was euphemistically known to Effie as the Smoky Town.

"Yes, dear."

"You go to the Smoky Town to make bread and butter, don't you, daddy?"

"Yes, dear, to make bread and butter."

"And did you make any, daddy?"

"Yes, Effie, a good deal to-day."

"Then where is it? In your pocket?"

"No, love, not exactly. I won a big lawsuit to-day, and I shall get a great many pennies for it."

"Oh," answered Effie meditatively, "I am glad that you did win. You do like to win, doesn't you, daddy, dear."

"Yes, love."

"Then I will give you a kiss, daddy, because you did win," and she suited the action to the word.

Geoffrey went from the little room with a softened heart. He dressed and ate some dinner.

Then he sat down and wrote a long letter to Beatrice, telling her all about the trial, and not sparing her his reasons for adopting each particular tactic and line of argument which conduced to the great

result.

And though his letter was four sheets in length, he knew that Beatrice would not be bored at having to read it.