

better see it," and with a gesture that was half shy and half defiant she drew the lace shawl from her shoulders, and turned her back towards him so that he might see what was inscribed across it.

Eustace stared at the broad line of letters which with the signatures written underneath might mean a matter of two millions of money to him.

"Thank you," he said at last, and, taking up the lace shawl, he threw it over her again.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes, Mr. Meeson," interrupted Lady Holmhurst at this point; "I have to go to see about the dinner," and before Augusta could interfere she had left the room.

Eustace closed the door behind her, and turned, feeling instinctively that a great crisis in his fortunes had come. There are some men who rise to an emergency and some who shrink from it, and the difference is, that difference between him who succeeds and him who fails in life, and in all that makes life worth living.

Eustace belonged to the class that rises and not to that which shrinks.

## CHAPTER XV.

## EUSTACE CONSULTS A LAWYER.

Augusta was leaning against the marble mantelpiece--indeed, one of her arms was resting upon it, for she was a tall woman. Perhaps she, too, felt that there was something in the air; at any rate, she turned away her head, and began to play with a bronze Japanese lobster which adorned the mantelpiece.

"Now for it," said Eustace to himself, drawing a long breath, to try and steady the violent pulsations of his heart.

"I don't know what to say to you Miss Smithers," he began.

"Best say nothing more about it," she put in quickly. "I did it, and I am glad that I did it. What do a few marks matter if a great wrong is prevented thereby? I am not ever likely to have to go to court. Besides, Mr. Meeson, there is another thing; it was through me that you lost your inheritance; it is only right that I should try to be the means of bringing it back to you."

She dropped her head again, and once more began to play with the bronze lobster, holding her arm in such a fashion that Eustace could not see her face. But if he could not see her face she could see his in the glass, and narrowly observed its every change, which, on the whole, though natural, was rather mean of her.

Poor Eustace grew pale and paler yet, till his handsome countenance became positively ghastly. It is wonderful how frightened young men are the first time that they propose. It wears off afterwards--with practice one gets accustomed to anything.

"Miss Smithers--Augusta," he gasped, "I want to say something to you!" and he stopped dead.

"Yes, Mr. Meeson," she answered cheerfully, "what is it?"

"I want to tell you"--and again he hesitated.

"What you are going to do about the will?" suggested Augusta.

"No--no; nothing about the will--please don't laugh at me and put me off!"

She looked up innocently--as much as to say that she never dreamed of doing either of these things. She had a lovely face, and the glance of the grey eyes quite broke down the barrier of his fears.

"Oh, Augusta, Augusta," he said, "don't you understand? I love you! I love you! No woman was ever loved before as I love you. I fell in love with you the very first time I saw you in the office at Meeson's, when I had the row with my uncle about you; and ever since then I have got

deeper and deeper in love with you. When I thought that you were drowned it nearly broke my heart, and often and often I wished that I were dead, too!"

It was Augusta's turn to be disturbed now, for, though a lady's composure will stand her in good stead up to the very verge of an affair of this sort, it generally breaks down in medias res. Anyhow, she certainly dropped her eyes and colored to her hair, while her breast began to heave tumultuously.

"Do you know, Mr. Meeson," she said at last, without daring to look at his imploring face, "that this is only the fourth time that we have seen each other, including yesterday."

"Yes, I know," he said; "but don't refuse me on that, account; you can see me as often as you like"--(this was generous of Master Eustace)--"and really I know you better than you think. I should think that I have read each of your books twenty times."

This was a happy stroke, for, however free from vanity a person may be, it is not in the nature of a young woman to hear that somebody has read her book twenty times without being pleased.

"I am not my books," said Augusta.

"No; but your books are part of you," he answered, "and I have learnt

more about your real self through them than I should have done if I had seen you a hundred times instead of four."

Augusta slowly raised her grey eyes till they met his own, and looked at him as though she were searching out his soul, and the memory of that long, sweet look is with him yet.

He said no more, nor had she any words; but somehow nearer and nearer they drew one to the other, till his arms were around her, and his lips were pressed upon her lips. Happy man and happy girl! they will live to find that life has joys (for those who are good and are well off) but that it has no joys so holy and so complete as that which they were now experiencing--the first kiss of true and honest love.

A little while afterwards the butler came in in a horribly sudden manner, and found Augusta and Eustace, the one very red and the other very pale, standing suspiciously close to each other. But he was a very well-trained butler and a man of experience, who had seen much and guessed more; and he looked innocent as a babe unborn.

Just then, too, Lady Holmhurst came in again and looked at the pair of them with an amusing twinkle in her eye. Lady Holmhurst, like her butler, was also a person of experience.

"Won't you come into the drawing room?" she said. And they did, looking rather sheepish.

And there Eustace made a clean breast of it, announcing that they were engaged to be married. And although this was somewhat of an assumption, seeing that no actual words of troth had passed between them, Augusta stood there, never offering a word in contradiction.

"Well, Mr. Meeson," said Lady Holmhurst, "I think that you are the luckiest man of my acquaintance, for Augusta is not only one of the sweetest and loveliest girls that I have ever met, she is also the bravest and the cleverest. You will have to look out, Mr. Meeson, or you will be known as the husband of the great Augusta Meeson."

"I will take the risk," he answered humbly. "I know that Augusta has more brains in her little finger than I have in my whole body. I don't know how she can look at a fellow like me."

"Dear me, how humble we are!" said Lady Holmhurst. "Well, that is the way of men before marriage. And now, as Augusta carries both your fortunes on her back as well as in her face and brain, I venture to suggest that you had better go and see a lawyer about the matter; that is, if you have quite finished your little talk. I suppose that you will come and dine with us, Mr. Meeson, and if you like to come a little early, say half-past six, I daresay that Augusta will arrange to be in, to hear what you have found out about this will, you know. And now--an revoir."

"I think that that is a very nice young man, my dear," said Lady

Holmhurst as soon as Eustace had bowed himself out. "It was rather audacious of him to propose to you the fourth time that he set eyes upon you; but I think that audacity is, on the whole, a good quality in the male sex. Another thing is, that if that will is worth anything he will be one of the wealthiest men in the whole of England; so, taking it altogether, I think I may congratulate you, my dear. And now I suppose that you have been in love with this young man all along. I guessed as much when I saw your face as he ran up to the carriage yesterday, and I was sure of it when I heard about the tattooing. No girl would allow herself to be tattooed in the interest of abstract justice. Oh, yes! I know all about it; and now I am going out walking in the park with Dick, and I should advise you to compose yourself, for that artist is coming to draw you at twelve."

And she departed and left Augusta to her reflections, which were--well, not unpleasant ones.

Meanwhile Eustace was marching towards the Temple. As it happened, in the same lodging-house where he had been living for the last few months, two brothers of the name of Short had rooms, and with these young gentlemen he had become very friendly. The two Shorts were twins, and so like one another that it was more than a month before Eustace could be sure which of them he was speaking to. When they were both at college their father died, leaving his property equally between them; and as this property on realisation was not found to amount to more than four hundred a year, the twins very rightly concluded that they had better do something to

supplement their moderate income. Accordingly, by a stroke of genius they determined that one of them should become a solicitor and the other a barrister, and then tossed up as to which should take to which trade. The idea, of course, was that in this manner they would be able to afford each other mutual comfort and support. John would give James briefs, and James' reflected glory would shine back on John. In short, they were anxious to establish a legal firm of the most approved pattern.

Accordingly, they passed their respective examinations, and John took rooms with another budding solicitor in the City, while James hired chambers in Pump-court. But there the matter stopped, for as John did not get any work, of course he could not give any to James. And so it came to pass that for the past three years neither of the twins had found the law as profitable as they anticipated. In vain did John sit and sigh in the City. Clients were few and far between: scarcely enough to pay his rent. And in vain did James, artistically robed, wander like the Evil One, from court to court, seeking what he might devour. Occasionally he had the pleasure of taking a note for another barrister who was called away, which means doing another man's work for nothing. Once, too, a man with whom he had a nodding acquaintance, rushed up to him, and, thrusting a brief into his hands, asked him to hold it for him, telling him that it would be on in a short time, and that there was nothing in it--"nothing at all." Scarcely had poor James struggled through the brief when the case was called on, and it may suffice to say that at its conclusion, the Judge gazed at him mildly, over his spectacles, and "could not help wondering that any learned counsel had been found who would consent to



waste the time of the Court in such a case as the one to which he had been listening." Clearly James' friend would not so consent, and had passed on the responsibility, minus the fee. On another occasion, James was in the Probate Court on motion day, and a solicitor--a real live solicitor--came up to him and asked him to make a motion (marked Mr.----, 2 gns.) for leave to dispense with a co-respondent. This motion he made, and the co-respondent was dispensed with in the approved fashion; but when he turned round the solicitor had vanished, and he never saw him more or the two guineas either. However, the brief, his only one, remained, and, after that, he took to hovering about the Divorce Court, partly in the hope of once more seeing that solicitor, and partly with a vague idea of drifting into practice in the Division.

Now, Eustace had often, when in the Shorts' sitting-room in the lodging-house in the Strand heard the barrister James hold forth learnedly on the matter of wills, and, therefore, he naturally enough turned towards him in his recent dilemma. Knowing the address of his chambers in Pump-court, he hurried thither, and was in due course admitted by a very small child, who apparently filled the responsible office of clerk to Mr. James Short and several other learned gentlemen, whose names appeared upon the door.

The infant regarded Eustace, when he opened the door, with a look of such preternatural sharpness, that it almost frightened him. The beginning of that eagle glance was full of inquiring hope, and the end of resigned despair. The child had thought that Eustace might be a client come to

tread the paths which no client ever had trod. Hence the hope and the despair in his eyes. Eustace had nothing of the solicitor's clerk about him. Clearly he was not a client.

Mr. Short was in "that door to the right." Eustace knocked, and entered into a bare little chamber about the size of a large housemaid's closet, furnished with a table, three chairs (one a basket easy), and a book-case, with a couple of dozen of law books, and some old volumes of reports, and a broad window-sill, in the exact centre of which lay the solitary and venerated brief.

Mr. James Short was a short, stout young man, with black eyes, a hooked nose, and a prematurely bald head. Indeed, this baldness of the head was the only distinguishing mark between James and John, and, therefore, a thing to be thankful for, though, of course, useless to the perplexed acquaintance who met them in the street when their hats were on. At the moment of Eustace's entry Mr. Short had been engaged in studying that intensely legal print, the Sporting Times, which, however, from some unexplained bashfulness, he had hastily thrown under the table, filling its space with a law book snatched at hazard from the shelf.

"All right, old fellow," said Eustace, whose quick eyes had caught the quick flutter of the vanishing paper; "don't be alarmed, it's only me."

"Ah!" said Mr. James Short, when he had shaken hands with him, "you see I thought that it might have been a client--a client is always possible,

however improbable, and one has to be ready to meet the possibility."

"Quite so, old fellow," said Eustace; "but do you know, as it happens, I am a client--and a big one, too; it is a matter of two millions of money--my uncle's fortune. There was another will, and I want to take your advice."

Mr. Short fairly bounded out of the chair in exultation, and then, struck by another thought, sank back into it again.

"My dear Meeson," he said, "I am sorry I cannot hear you."

"Eh," said Eustace; "what do you mean?"

"I mean that you are not accompanied by a solicitor, and it is not the etiquette of the profession to which I belong to see a client unaccompanied by a solicitor."

"Oh, hang the etiquette of the profession!"

"My dear Meeson, if you came to me as a friend I should be happy to give you any legal information in my power, and I flatter myself that I know something of matters connected with probate. But you yourself said that you have come as a client, and in that case the personal relationship sinks into the background and is superseded by the official relationship. Under these circumstances it is evident that the etiquette of the

profession intervenes, which overmastering force compels me to point out to you how improper and contrary to precedent it would be for me to listen to you without the presence of a properly qualified solicitor."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Eustace, "I had no idea that you were so particular; I thought perhaps that you would be glad of the job."

"Certainly--certainly! In the present state of my practice," as he glanced at the solitary brief, "I should be the last to wish to turn away work. Let me suggest that you should go and consult my brother John, in the Poultry. I believe business is rather slack with him just now, so I think it probable that you will find him disengaged. Indeed, I dare say that I may go so far as to make an appointment for him here--let us say in an hour's time. Stop! I will consult my clerk! Dick!"

The infant appeared.

"I believe that I have no appointment for this morning?"

"No, Sir," said Dick, with a twinkle in his eye. "One moment, Sir, I will consult the book," and he vanished, to return presently with the information that Mr. Short's time was not under any contributions that day.

"Very good," said Mr. Short; "then make an entry of an appointment with Mr. John Short and Mr. Meeson, at two precisely."

"Yes, Sir," said Dick, departing to the unaccustomed task.

As soon as Eustace had departed from Tweedledum to Tweedledee, or, in other words, from James, barrister, to John, solicitor, Dick was again summoned and bade go to a certain Mr. Thomson on the next floor. Mr. Thomson had an excellent library, which had come to him by will. On the strength of this bequest, he had become a barrister-at-law, and the object of Dick's visit was to request the loan of the eighth volume of the statutes revised, containing the Wills Act of 1 Vic., cap. 26, "Brown on Probate," "Dixon on Probate," and "Powles on Brown," to the study of which valuable books Mr. James Short devoted himself earnestly whilst awaiting his client's return.

Meanwhile, Eustace had made his way in a two-penny 'bus to one of those busy courts in the City where Mr. John Short practised as a solicitor. Mr. Short's office was, Eustace discovered by referring to a notice board, on the seventh floor of one of the tallest houses he had ever seen. However, up he went with a stout heart, and after some five minutes of a struggle, that reminded him forcibly of climbing the ladders of a Cornish mine, he arrived at a little door right at the very top of the house on which was painted "Mr. John Short, solicitor." Eustace knocked and the door was opened by a small boy, so like the small boy he had seen at Mr. James Short's at the temple that he fairly started. Afterwards the mystery was explained. Like their masters, the two small boys were brothers.

Mr. John Short was within, and Eustace was ushered into his presence. To all appearance he was consulting a voluminous mass of correspondence written on large sheets of brief paper; but when he looked at it closely, it seemed to Eustace that the edges of the paper were very yellow, and the ink was much faded. This, however, was not to be wondered at, seeing that Mr. John Short had taken them over with the other fixtures of the office.