

SIR JOHN GOTCH ACTS.

XLII.

Sir John Gotch was a little man with scrubby hair, a small, thin nose sticking out of a face crackled with wrinkles, tight brown gaiters, and a riding whip. "I've come, you see," he said, as Mrs Hinijer closed the door.

"Thank you," said the Vicar, "I'm obliged to you. I'm really obliged to you."

"Glad to be of any service to you," said Sir John Gotch. (Angular attitude.)

"This business," said the Vicar, "this unfortunate business of the barbed wire--is really, you know, a most unfortunate business."

Sir John Gotch became decidedly more angular in his attitude. "It is," he said.

"This Mr Angel being my guest--"

"No reason why he should cut my wire," said Sir John Gotch, briefly.

"None whatever."

"May I ask who this Mr Angel is?" asked Sir John Gotch with the abruptness of long premeditation.

The Vicar's fingers jumped to his chin. What was the good of talking to a man like Sir John Gotch about Angels?

"To tell you the exact truth," said the Vicar, "there is a little secret--"

"Lady Hammergallow told me as much."

The Vicar's face suddenly became bright red.

"Do you know," said Sir John, with scarcely a pause, "he's been going about this village preaching Socialism?"

"Good heavens!" said the Vicar, "No!"

"He has. He has been buttonholing every yokel he came across, and asking them why they had to work, while we--I and you, you know--did nothing. He has been saying we ought to educate every man up to your level and mine--out of the rates, I suppose, as usual. He has been suggesting that we--I and you, you know--keep these people down--pith 'em."

"Dear me!" said the Vicar, "I had no idea."

"He has done this wire-cutting as a demonstration, I tell you, as a Socialistic demonstration. If we don't come down on him pretty sharply, I tell you, we shall have the palings down in Flinders Lane next, and the next thing will be ricks afire, and every damned (I beg your pardon, Vicar. I know I'm too fond of that word), every blessed pheasant's egg in the parish smashed. I know these--"

"A Socialist," said the Vicar, quite put out, "I had no idea."

"You see why I am inclined to push matters against our gentleman though he is your guest. It seems to me he has been taking advantage of your paternal--"

"Oh, not paternal!" said the Vicar. "Really--"

"(I beg your pardon, Vicar--it was a slip.) Of your kindness, to go mischief-making everywhere, setting class against class, and the poor man against his bread and butter."

The Vicar's fingers were at his chin again.

"So there's one of two things," said Sir John Gotch. "Either that Guest of yours leaves the parish, or--I take proceedings. That's final."

The Vicar's mouth was all askew.

"That's the position," said Sir John, jumping to his feet, "if it were not for you, I should take proceedings at once. As it is--am I to take proceedings or no?"

"You see," said the Vicar in horrible perplexity.

"Well?"

"Arrangements have to be made."

"He's a mischief-making idler.... I know the breed. But I'll give you a week----"

"Thank you," said the Vicar. "I understand your position. I perceive the situation is getting intolerable...."

"Sorry to give you this bother, of course," said Sir John.

"A week," said the Vicar.

"A week," said Sir John, leaving.

The Vicar returned, after accompanying Gotch out, and for a long time he

remained sitting before the desk in his study, plunged in thought. "A week!" he said, after an immense silence. "Here is an Angel, a glorious Angel, who has quickened my soul to beauty and delight, who has opened my eyes to Wonderland, and something more than Wonderland, ... and I have promised to get rid of him in a week! What are we men made of?... How can I tell him?"

He began to walk up and down the room, then he went into the dining-room, and stood staring blankly out at the cornfield. The table was already laid for lunch. Presently he turned, still dreaming, and almost mechanically helped himself to a glass of sherry.