FRIENDSHIPS *and* ENMITIES

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Robertson took more care to make that dinner perfect than some will to make themselves perfect. It was such a dinner as one epicure might give to another—brief but exquisite.

When the servants were out of the room, and they were drinking the '78—one of the only five remaining, I grieve to say—Mr. Robertson rose in his place and said with a pleasant smile:

"It's old-fashioned to propose a toast, but please forgive it. I won't make a speech, but give my toast in two words, To Friendship!"

All stood up to drink, and as Lucy Barnes subsided into her place again, she said to her host:

"Thanks. That was most frightfully nice of you."

After dinner they all played bridge (infamously) and greatly enjoyed it.

And all through the evening the word pony was never used by anybody. There was not even a tacit implication that there was such an animal, or even had been, or ever could be.

When in their turn shortly afterwards the Barnes couple invited the Robertson couple to dinner, Tom Barnes, aged fourteen, felt it his duty to issue a word of warning to his father.

"I suppose," said Tom, "it's all right—this getting so thick with the Robertsons again, but don't forget that he did you in the eye over that pony."

But his advice—it happens sometimes to the best of advice—was not well received. He was told that a boy just out of the nursery would do better not to pass comments on a man who was not only much older than he was, but also a far finer man than Tom could ever hope to be. Mr. Robertson had never cheated anybody in his life and was incapable of any attempt to cheat. He had made a perfectly natural mistake, for which he had expressed his regret and made full reparation. (Here perhaps Mr. Barnes wandered into the region of overstatement.) And if Tom failed in any way to show a proper respect for Mr. Robertson, then Tom would be given some sound reasons to remember his manners in the future.

In fact, Tom, as he afterwards stated to an intimate friend, "got it in the neck."

It was another successful dinner. Mr. Robertson expressed the warmest appreciation of the Madeira, and Mr. Barnes, who had inherited a well-stocked cellar from his father, with Madeira as a principal feature, sent round a case of the wine with his compliments to Mr. Robertson on the following morning.

The old relations were resumed. Once more the two men travelled to and from the City together. And if it happened to be raining when they met on the platform Mr. Barnes never failed to observe that it was nice weather for the ducks, and Mr. Robertson always greeted this witty remark with an appreciative smile.

They played golf together frequently, and their renewed friendship stood even this strain. They sometimes were rather cross with their caddies. Mr. Barnest once said that if on that particular day a stone-blind, one-armed imbecile offered him a stroke a hole he would not dare to play it. Mr. Robertson on his off-day was equally vehement in self-depreciation. But they never quarrelled with one another. Never!

It seemed all right—quite all right. But then they decided to go down to the Derby together.

They did not take their wives with them. Annie Robertson disliked crowds. Lucy Barnes had been to the Derby once, and found it full, dusty, and detestable. So the two ladies were left to spend the day together. But the men did take with them a hamper that provided a sufficient margin for hospitality to the City friends they would probably encounter. They travelled in Mr. Robertson's larger car, and Tilling (who, it will be remembered, had six years' racing-stable experience) drove them. It was a glorious morning. They made an early start and in the first five minutes the trouble began.

"Two months ago," said George William Barnes, "I little thought that I should see the Derby run this year."

"Two months ago, to be frank," said James Robert Robertson, "I never thought you'd be alive for it. You remember that afternoon when I came round to see you?"

"I do. I remember it to your credit. A man who has the moral courage to own up an error, and to express his regret for it, always has my respect."

"Glad to have your respect, George, but at the same time I don't want to get it by a misapprehension. I admitted no error——"

"You said distinctly, 'We all make mistakes.' "

"If you'll kindly allow me to speak, I admitted no error because in the matter in dispute I had committed none. What I said was in reply to the apology which came from you. You said 'Let bygones be bygones,' and if that was not asking me to overlook a past offence on your part, then the English language has no meaning."

"You may choose to put that complexion on it, but you know as well as I do that nothing was further from my thoughts. I remember the incident perfectly."

"Do you? Then that takes away your last excuse. If you'd been light-headed at the time I would have understood it."

"My temperature was under normal."

"Apparently it isn't now. Why can't you listen to sense? The day after our quarrel I saw the pony of mine trotting along the road without a thing the matter with him, and the gipsy who was driving him wouldn't let him go under £15."

"Are you really as simple as all that? Don't you know that a clever horse-coper can often doctor a lame animal so that he'll look all right for an hour or two, and in that hour or two he sells him to some