

DEALING IN FUTURES.

By ALICE W. ROLLINS.

SCENE.—A luxuriously furnished drawing-room; the only essentials: a fire in the grate, a piano, a small table with decanter and glasses, a volume of Heuley's Verses, a long mirror and a screen.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HARRY, a young gentleman of thirty,
HARRY'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER.
HARRY'S FUTURE SON.
HARRY'S FUTURE DAUGHTER.
PHILIP,
TOMMY,
ETHEL,
HELEN,
MAHKL,
MISS ST. CLAIR, a doll.

HARRY (after remising a few moments in a big arm-chair, reflecting, rises slowly and leans against the mantel): 'Well, after all, it concerns no one but myself, and I am my own master. I can do as I please. The only trouble is to know exactly what I do please. I've half a mind to leave it to chance.'

Voice (from room on the right): 'Wait a minute, Harry.' Harry: 'Why, what is that? I thought everyone went to bed an hour ago; and I don't recognize the voice.' He steps in the direction of the voice. Enter, towards him, a fine looking old gentleman,

Old Gentleman: 'And you could have either of them?'

Harry (simply): 'Why, of course.'

Old Gentleman: 'Well, I wouldn't be too sure of that, if I were you. Sometimes they surprise you. However, I wish to warn you that you are not really in love with either, and if I were you, I would wait to be really in love.'

Harry: 'But I assure you, sir, I am very much in love.'

Old Gentleman: 'Oh, no, Harry; no man ever loved two women—at a time. But, if you think so, why not marry the rich one? Riches ought not to count too much in a girl's favour, but then, again, they ought not to weigh against her. Why are you troubled about the wealth, if you love both the girls?'

Harry (slowly): 'Why, you see—'

Old Gentleman (smiling): 'Yes, I see more than you think I do. I believe you are a little in love, after all. Well, let the love grow, and wait a bit; then, in the course of time—'

Harry (impatiently): 'Well, sir?'

Old Gentleman: 'She will decide for you.'

Harry: 'But which she?'

Old Gentleman: 'The one you love. I went through the same experience, at your age—'

Harry (eagerly): 'And what did you decide, sir?'

Old Gentleman (quizzically): 'Didn't I tell you that I had decided to go to heaven, young man?'

Harry: 'Yes, of course; and I am ready to make any sacrifice to go to heaven myself; only I can't decide what

quite frankly to ask you a favour: I wish very much you would be so good as never to do anything that will make me ashamed of myself. Now, your great-grandmamma—'

Harry (smiling): 'What a pity a man cannot marry a great-grandmamma!'

Old Gentleman: 'But you see, he does marry the great-grandmamma of his future great grandchildren. The trouble is, he never thinks about them; it is only some hundred years later, when he himself is in the grave, that he begins to wonder whether he treated them quite fairly in his choice of a great-grandmother for them. And then, when you think that perhaps you have sent some fine young fellow into the world handicapped with a few of your own worst traits, you begin to feel then, Harry, as if you wished you could begin all over again. I should choose the same great-grandmamma for you that I did before; but as for myself—I might—' (slowly) 'yes, I might—'

Harry (smiling): 'And then again you might not. Don't have me on your conscience, I beg of you, sir. I assure you, I'm a very good sort of a fellow on the whole, and in a world where most of the people are sinners I should be ashamed not to take my share of a few human foibles. If one is a human being, he ought not to be ashamed of being human. I assure you, I should quite hate to be a saint; I don't mind the few bad qualities you may have given me, a bit, sir; I rather enjoy them. One wants to know the world as it is.'

Old Gentleman: 'Yes, of course, of course. One wants to know the world; but then there is another point of view about that. We like to know the world; but did it ever occur to you that we have the honour of making the world that our great-grandchildren will want to know? Now, if you stop to think about it, it really is quite as interesting to make history as to read it. We ought to enjoy making a world as well as knowing one.'

Harry: 'Quite true, sir. But doesn't it seem a little egotistic to assume that to be an editorial "we"? One man can't make a world or change one very much. I think every man wants his fling once in his life. It's a very good kind of a world, on the whole, that you have handed down to me; and I'm afraid if you had left out a few of the things that weigh on your conscience, I shouldn't have liked it half so well.'

Old Gentleman: 'Well, I'm glad you like it, Harry—I'm glad you like it, and I think I can trust you.' (Rising and going towards the young man) 'You have your grandmother's eyes. Those are eyes that can be trusted. I must be going now. Good-bye, good-bye! and take good care of yourself. Don't make any mistakes—for my sake.'

Harry: 'But don't you think, sir, that if ghosts return to beg you not to make a mistake, they ought to bring with them at least the ghost of an idea as to what would be a mistake?'

Old Gentleman: 'O well, as you observed just now, you want to be your own master in some things. Good-bye, good-bye, my boy! [Exit.]

Voice, from inner room on the left: 'Are you in here, sir?'

Harry: 'What! another ghost of the past?'

Voice: 'No; this time it's a ghost of the future.' (A bright young fellow of eighteen comes forward eagerly with frank smile and candid eyes) 'They told me I should find my father in here, sir, I'm very glad to meet you. You see Hallowe'en is my only chance of seeing you before I am born; and to tell you the truth, I wanted very much to ask you for something.'

Harry: 'Anything, anything, my boy. So you are my future son? I'm very glad to see you, very glad to see you, indeed; for you seem like a fine fellow. You are a fine fellow, I hope?'

Son: 'I hope so, sir. I come—that is, I hope I'm going to come—from fine stock.'

Harry: 'You shall, my boy, you shall. And now what can I do for you? I always said I meant to be very good to my son from the day he was born.'

Son: 'Ah! but you see, the time to be very good to us is before we are born. Of course, sir, you will want me to



Old Gentleman: 'Ah, good evening, Harry, my boy. You don't know me, I see.'

Harry: 'I didn't recognize your voice, sir. Have you just arrived?'

Old Gentleman: 'Just arrived. Not by the late train, however. It is Hallowe'en, you remember; the one night in the year when we ghosts—'

Harry: 'Ghosts?'

Old Gentleman: 'Yes, my boy, ghosts. I am the ghost of your great-grandfather.'

Harry: 'A very delightful ghost, I am sure. And you come from—'

Old Gentleman: 'From heaven, Harry, from heaven.'

Harry: 'I was certain of that. This is very interesting. Will you sit down, sir? I am particularly anxious to night to know what heaven is like. Is it having everything you want?'

Old Gentleman: 'No; it is knowing what you do want, in addition to liking what you happen to have. It isn't that everything is interesting, but that you are always interested.'

Harry: 'Knowing what you do want! I can understand that. It would be heaven on earth for me to night to know exactly what I want. You see, I cannot decide which of two lovely girls to marry.'

Old Gentleman: 'You love one of them, I suppose, and the other is rich?'

Harry: 'Oh no! You mustn't think so meanly of me as that. You must not suppose I would marry a girl I did not love, merely because she was rich. The trouble is, I'm in love with them both.'

Old Gentleman: 'Oh! with both?'

Harry: 'Yes, sir, with both.'

would be heaven. Of course, it wouldn't be heaven to marry a girl I didn't love; but then to marry a girl I did love, and not be able to take her to the theatre once a week, wouldn't be heaven, either. And then, again, I might be loving the wrong woman, and by and-by, after I had married her, find I didn't love her; then I shouldn't have either the girl I loved or the things I liked. After all, sir, the things of this world make up a good deal of our enjoyment of it. You can't be sure that you will always love the woman you think you love; but you can be absolutely certain that you will always like the things that you like.'

Old Gentleman: 'But you must be very careful not to throw yourself away, Harry. You see, I feel, in a measure, responsible for you. It's a hard thing to feel that, perhaps, you have handed down all your worst traits to some fine young fellow in the next generation—by the way, Harry, you are a fine young fellow, I hope?'

Harry (smiling): 'I come of good stock, sir.'

Old Gentleman: 'Yes, that is true; your great-grandmamma was an Eliot, as they say in Boston; a young fellow with such a great-grandmamma ought to be something of a man. But for fear you might have inherited some of my less fortunate traits, I gave up going to the theatre to-night.'

Harry: 'But I beg of you, sir, not to feel the weight of my deeds on your conscience. After all, you know, a man must be his own master. I assure you, I shall never think of laying the blame for my decision upon you.'

Old Gentleman: 'Not for your decision, of course. I don't expect to be responsible for your decision; I was only afraid I might be responsible for your indecision. Lots of people, Harry, will advise you never to do anything that will make you ashamed of yourself; but I have come



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have ambitions and aspirations and all that sort of thing?'

Harry: 'Of course, my boy, of course, and what is your ambition?'

Son: 'I want to break the record for the high jump. And you see I can't do that unless I inherit a good constitution. All I want of you, sir, is a good constitution!'

Harry (sadly): 'Is that all? Don't you want a few of my good traits of character handed down to you?'

Son: 'Oh, yes; I should rather like a few good traits as a background, perhaps.'

Harry: 'And how about my bad ones?'

Son (merrily): 'Oh, don't give me any of those, please! I shall have had ones enough of my own; trust me for that!'