

"I would advise you to find a rich woman. And here she is," said the lady, holding out her hand. "I will venture to lend you one hundred thousand pounds, Mr. Stanford."

CHAPTER VII.

The young man looked at Mrs Greenhow in amazement. In spite of the fact that it was his business to disseminate ideas among the people, he was himself rather slow at comprehending anything unusual.

"Do you mean to offer," he asked in astonishment, "to furnish all the money?"

"Yes," she replied rather gaily, "I mean to be the Reformation of England Company, Limited, myself."

"But I can give you no guarantee," he said dolefully.

"I knew you were a poor company promoter," she replied. "You should leave all objections to the capitalist, and confine yourself to answering them; that will give you quite enough to do."

The young man's eyes were not upon her, but seemed to be gazing into distant futurity. This somewhat piqued the lady, who thought he ought to have thanked her warmly instead of acting as though she were not there.

"If you paid the money into the bank, say five hundred pounds at a time," said the young man, meditatively, more to himself than to the lady. "I could give you vouchers that would show you accurately to what use I was putting the cash."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs Greenhow. "A woman trusts altogether, or not at all. If you want to cheat me you have an excellent opportunity; I shall not prosecute you. I cannot bother looking over vouchers."

Something in the aggrieved tone drew the young man's eyes from scanning the future to her face.

"I am glad," he at length said, "that you believe in my project."

"I don't believe in it in the least," she cried.

"Then why do you offer to furnish the money?"

"Oh, for various reasons. As you know, I have given away a good deal of money in a manner which you think is not at all to my credit. I think myself that it has done very little good. What I like about your scheme is, that it is going to give employment to a number of deserving young men at thirty shillings, and one pound a week. They will earn the money, and therefore, will have a right to it; even you will admit that, so long as they do not invest their savings in land, which, I think, there is little chance of their doing on thirty shillings a week."

"If you do not believe in the justice of our crusade, I shall not take the money."

"What difference does that make?" she cried impatiently, "you have belief enough for a dozen. I shall know that the money is distributed among a number of deserving young men, who are earning it. That will be satisfaction enough for me. If your crusade is successful, the world may be the better for it. We shall see. But for a man who believes as you do, to refuse money, from whatever source it comes, seems to me very futile; in fact, you make me doubt the sincerity of your mission, by your refusal. A real reformer takes whatever he can get, so long as it puts forward his cause."

"Yes," said Stanford, "I was wrong to speak of refusing, but I was thinking more of you than of the cause, for the moment. I should not like you to lose your money, you know."

(To be Continued.)

THE BLACK SHEEP CLUB.

If Mr. Ellis, of Ellis & Co., importers of silks and fine fabrics, had applied to anyone else the profane epithets he was applying to himself he would have been arrested. He was walking back and forth in his private room swearing at himself quietly but vehemently, with a skill that showed long experience. Anyone hearing him would have been certain that at some time in his career he had been either a cabdriver or a sailor before the mast; but he took special care that no one should hear him. Presently he regained his self-control, seated himself at his desk, and wrote a memorandum. He then gave his desk bell a vicious snap. In response to the signal his bookkeeper entered.

"Here, Jones, charge cheque No. 859, that I have just drawn, to profit and loss."

"Yes, sir. Anything more to-day?"

"Nothing more, thank you. Good evening."

He then closed his desk, and was reaching for his overcoat when an office boy entered with a card.

"Mr. Hart, of Hart & Hall, wishes to see you, sir."

"Um—Hart & Hull, dealers in heavy chemicals, dyestuffs, etc. What can he want with me? Show him in." A moment later Mr. Hart entered. He was faultlessly attired, and, like Mr. Ellis, had all the appearance of a prosperous business man and member of good society. And they were alike in that the expressions of their faces were keen but kindly, and showed great force of character.

"I presume," began Mr. Hart, as he seated himself slowly and gingerly, "that you are at a loss to understand to what you owe this visit."

"I confess that I am."

"Then I will come to the point at once. The Black Sheep Club has decided that you are eligible for membership, and I have called to ask if you can make it convenient to come up to our club-rooms to-night and be initiated."

"The Black Sheep Club! I never heard of it."

"Certainly not. It is the most secret and yet the most beneficent organization in the world."

"Well, Mr. Hart, I know you by reputation as a business man and gentleman, and feel sure you would not like to play a joke on me; but I would like to know something more about this club before consenting to become a member."

"Naturally, and if you will pledge yourself to the most absolute secrecy I will tell you all I dare. I may say, however, that this pledge is hardly necessary, as no one to whom membership was offered ever refused to join. That is why the secret never got out."

The required pledge was given, and Mr. Hart resumed.

"If I am not mistaken you are just in the humour to be initiated. Before I came in you were reviling yourself with every emphatic word and phrase in your vocabulary, were you not?"

"Look here! This club of yours is not a Theosophical affair, is it?"

"Not at all! I am a no mind reader. But I know this is true because I met that loafer, Spencer Smythe, coming downstairs as I was coming up. You have been supporting him for the last couple of months—not because he has any claim on you, but because you are easy on wrongdoers for the reason that you know what it is to have gone wrong yourself."

"How dare you talk to me like this, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Ellis angrily, springing from his seat. "I have never discussed such matters with my nearest friends."

"No," replied Mr. Hart, calmly, and no one is going to ask you to do it now. I merely do it in order to give you some idea of our club. It is wholly composed of hard-headed business and professional men who are tender-hearted and cannot help allowing themselves to be imposed upon by good-for-nothings like Smythe, just as you have been doing. Like you, every one of them began life by being a black sheep."

"Look here! What do you know about my past life?"

"Pardon me for speaking of it, for you have already lived it down so far as the world is concerned, though it still worries you and makes you swear retrospectively whenever you think of it; but I know all about that little escapade of yours when you

ran away from home and disgraced your family."

Mr. Ellis cowered in his chair and covered his face with his hands. "Yes, yes," he whispered brokenly, "and I have been punished for it enough, without its coming back to disgrace me now."

"Disgrace nothing," said Mr. Hart, cheerily. "It is what put backbone in you, and all your success has been due to the fact that you have been trying to live down that episode in your life. Believe me, there is no such thing as ambition in the world. Men merely strive for success because they want to live down their past. It is the same with everyone in our club. I made an idiot of myself when I was a boy, and I don't dare to be idle for fear I'll think of it. The result is that I work with the ferocity that compels success. Talk about your blithering fools! I was the—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Ellis, "I begin to catch your drift. You are all successful men because you have sore places in your memories that goad you on. But what benefit do you derive from your club?"

"What do you feel like when you think of your early misdeeds—or of any stupid thing that you do?"

"I feel that I want to be kicked!"

"Exactly! So do we all! And the beauty of it is that we get kicked. It wouldn't do for a gentleman to hire someone to kick him, so we attend to that for one another."

Ellis laughed a nervous laugh, in which Hart joined.

"I tell you, our club fills a long-felt want!" he exclaimed. "Won't you join us?"

"Certainly I will," cried Ellis. "I am in just the mood for it."

"I thought you would be. Let us

hurry, for they are keeping dinner for us."

On the way in a cab Hart explained more thoroughly the workings of the club.

"When a man is initiated we try to give him a kicking that will make up for all the kickings he has yearned for in the past. For this we charge an initiation fee of £5. We have no monthly dues, but whenever a man wants to be kicked he pays two pounds to the treasurer, and is obliged. We find that this enables us to maintain our club luxuriously."

"But it isn't registered as the Black Sheep Club, is it?"

"Certainly not. It is called the Business Men's Benevolent Association. You will be surprised to learn that many of your dearest friends belong to it. They are men whom perhaps you have considered selfish because they always show a preference for cushioned seats when visiting, and luxurious because they sit in cushioned chairs in their offices. But that is not selfishness. It is an inevitable result of membership in the Black Sheep Club. Why, I know of large corporations that have all the furniture in their executive chambers richly cushioned because a majority of the members belong to our club. Though we knew that you must have a past because you were successful and allowed yourself to be imposed upon, it took a long time to discover what your past was. But we finally found that you too had been a black sheep."

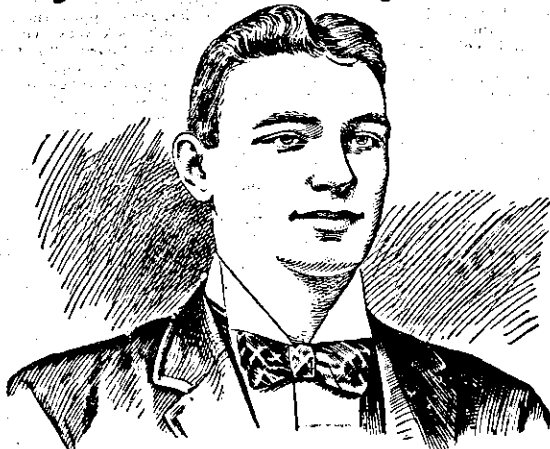
"Oh, sink my past! Our peccadilloes are not the subject of all conversation, are they?" exclaimed Ellis, in terror.

"What do you take us for? We are all men of the world, and, besides, there is a rule of the club, which has

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