

the feelings of the entire people of this country in regard to Lord and Lady Aberdeen, whom in their name we wish every success and happiness in the high estate which they are about to adorn.

LADY WHITTINGHAM'S DIAMOND BRACELET.

(From *Vanity Fair*.)

QUITE a large crowd had gathered outside one of the houses in Grosvenor place. And, in spite of the cold wind and rainy weather, it watched with considerable interest the wealth of beauty and fashion as it alighted from all manner of carriages and hurried up the covered steps towards the light and warmth within. It was Mrs Wynton's first dance of the season; and since her dances were much thought of, and her invitations sought after, they were always immense successes.

Somewhat late in arriving were Lord and Lady Whittingham, who were a particularly interesting couple just at this time. Lord Whittingham, a man of great wealth, with estates in three counties and a moor in Scotland, had somewhat astonished the world by marrying a lady of whom nobody had ever heard. It was quite a romantic affair. He had known her long before he came into his possessions; had made an offer which she accepted, but which her father peremptorily refused, because, it is said, he had in view a more wealthy suitor. When Lord Whittingham asked again, however, with all the glory of his wealth to back him up, the father said "Yes" with considerable alacrity.

Lord and Lady Whittingham had been abroad since their wedding some six months ago, and to-night was one of their first appearances in London. As many people had never seen Lady Whittingham, they were anxious to know her and judge for themselves if the reports of her beauty were correct or greatly exaggerated. Of course when she was seen opinions varied. The ladies who had passed the envious age, and the men, came to the conclusion that report had been too faint in her praise. The ladies who now considered themselves the beauties and leaders of fashion thought that rumour had been too kind, and found many faults with Lady Whittingham.

Judged without prejudice, there is little doubt that she was the most attractive woman in Mrs Wynton's rooms that evening. Dark, tall, stately, with grace befitting a queen, she was a woman born to be admired, yet so simple and charming withal that for every one, no matter what their temperament, she had a charm. She wore little jewellery beyond a very handsome diamond bracelet, one of her husband's wedding gifts.

Lord Whittingham was standing in a corner of one of the rooms talking to two or three friends who were congratulating him when a servant entered and handed him a card.

"John Jefferson!" he muttered, glancing at it. "Don't know him—never heard of him. Where is he?" he asked.

"In the library, my Lord."

"I will come. You'll excuse me for a moment," he said, turning to his companions.

In the library he found an unknown man in evening dress.

"Lord Whittingham, I presume?" the stranger said, advancing.

"That is my name."

The other smiled and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You do not know me. Of course. I am a detective. The fact is, my Lord, we have every reason to believe that a certain bracelet that Lady Whittingham is wearing to-night—your gift to her I believe—will be stolen."

"Stolen!"

"Yes. Perhaps your Lordship is unaware that several robberies of a daring description have been committed within the past year in London drawing-rooms. You see, there are men who obtain invitations almost everywhere, nobody knowing much about them; but the mere fact of their being met in good society places them above suspicion."

"I have heard so, but hardly believed," replied Lord Whittingham.

"We have information which leads us to suppose that the game will be tried in this house to-night."

"I am very much obliged to you for the information. I will warn Lady Whittingham, and get her to remove the ornament."

"No, my Lord, that is not wise. I am here from Scotland Yard to catch the thief, and your plan will be to frustrate him. Here is a common, though, I believe, exact, imitation of the bracelet in question. Do you think you would easily be able to tell the difference?"

From his pocket he produced a jewel-case containing so exact a copy of the bracelet that Lord Whittingham was astonished. Every stone was represented, and so artfully was the imitation carried out that an ordinary individual would not have been able, at a glance, to tell it from the original.

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Lord Whittingham. "How and where could such a copy be taken?"

"The copy is easy enough. To make the sham look real is the hard part."

"Well," what do you want to do?"

"Just this," said Mr Jefferson. "Let me be an old and particular friend of yours for to-night. Introduce me to your wife as such. I can express admiration of the bracelet she is wearing. I can ask to see it, and change it for this, transferring the genuine one to this case. This will save the bracelet should I fail to catch the thief. Then my task is easy. I have simply to watch until the sham one is taken. The real one in the case I will hand over to you."

"But Lady Whittingham may notice the change."

"I think not. You could, perhaps, attract her attention at the moment she hands me the bracelet. It will make the deception easier."

Lord Whittingham promised to do so, and suggested that they should at once go in search of his wife.

"It is best to lose no time. By the way, what shall I call you?"

"Anything; Duncan, if you like—Richard Duncan. You have no friend of that name who has already been introduced to Lady Whittingham?"

"No."

They went to the ballroom together in conversation. They found Lady Whittingham sitting in the conservatory with one of her partners, and even in that dim light the magnificent jewels on her arm flashed and sparkled. Lord Whittingham advanced with his companion.

"Lucy," he said, "I want to introduce a very old friend of mine, Mr Duncan—Richard, my wife."

Mr Duncan bowed, and took the seat vacated by Lady Whittingham's partner.

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance," he said. "Lord Whittingham and I are such old friends that I hope you will not look upon me as a stranger." And he went on: "It seems strange his being married. We had begun to look upon him as a confirmed bachelor, you know."

Lord Whittingham smiled at the ease with which the detective spoke, and said:

"Ah, I kept my secret well, you see?"

Fortunately, as Lord Whittingham thought, Lady Whittingham was disengaged for the next dance, so they remained in the conservatory talking.

"Will you pardon an impertinence?" Duncan said, presently; "but what a magnificent bracelet you are wearing!"

Lady Whittingham held up her arm.

"Yes, isn't it lovely? One of my husband's presents"

"I hope you admire my task," said Lord Whittingham. "Look at it."

Lady Whittingham unclasped it from her arm. At the same moment her husband called her attention to a couple dancing, and Duncan slipped the bracelet behind him. When Lady Whittingham turned round again he was holding it in his hand, turning it this way and that to let the light fall upon it.

"Very handsome!" he said, handing it back. "Allow me," and he clasped it upon her arm, telling Lord Whittingham by a glance that the exchange had been made.

Presently Lady Whittingham was claimed by another partner, and her husband and the detective were left alone.

"Have you done it?"

"Yes."

"The imitation is wonderful. I noticed it upon her arm, and I do not think she will discover the deception."

"No, I think not. And now I will leave you and watch."

By this time the rooms were full. Charming dresses, charming faces, and merry laughter. Even Mrs Wynton had excelled herself. The pretty little hostess was ubiquitous. Not a dull moment was allowed. Lady Whittingham was an attraction to-night; and she rose to the occasion well, dancing unceasingly, and never seeming tired. Had she enjoyed herself less she might have had leisure to notice how her husband's friend, Richard Duncan, followed her about. He was always close at hand when she sat down with her partner. When she was dancing he stood watching her. One or two other people noticed it.

Suddenly he became restless and more on the alert than ever. Lady Whittingham began to waltz with a man who had not danced much during the evening. He was a good dancer, and he and his partner sailed round the room talking pleasantly.

Lord Whittingham had just then approached the detective, and understood at once the cause of his excitement.

"Is that the man?"

"Yes."

Unconscious of the fate awaiting him, Lady Whittingham's partner danced on; and as they passed Lord Whittingham noticed that the bracelet no longer sparkled on his wife's arm. It was gone. The robbery must have been very skilfully performed.

As they approached the detective stepped forward and stopped him.

"Your bracelet, Lady Whittingham?" he said.