

The old friends sat about the fireplace and told stories.—Page 714.

TOMMY

By Charles Belmont Davis

ILLUSTRATIONS BY N. C. WYETH

EVER since its formation the Cinderella Club had held its annual dinner on Christmas Eve. That this time-honored custom had been established and had been maintained with the full consent of the five wives, who were content to remain at home and decorate their Christmas trees unaided spoke volumes for the high standing of the five members.

Years before they had been schoolmates and had played on the ball team together against the rival nine of the academy from the neighboring town. And when the school-days were over three of them had gone to Princeton and one to Harvard and another to Yale. But the span of four years of separation was quickly over, and although when they returned to their native town each wore a different fraternity pin on his waistcoat, the five old chums were soon bonded together again with a tie which re-

quired no solemn oath of secrecy nor a tinsel emblem.

The days of play and text-books were over now, and each of the five took up the serious work of life—one became a lawyer, another a merchant, another a broker, and the last two started together on the lowest rung of the ladder in a banking-house and in time one sat in the president's chair and financed great sums of money and pushed an electric button when he wished to consult his old friend, who had been appointed receiving-teller after much difficulty, although backed by great influence.

In the case of the five men, the story of the Scriptures had been somewhat reversed, for it was the one who had received the ten talents who had buried his treasure and had done the least to profit by his opportunities.

"Tommy" Carter, as he had always been

and was still familiarly called by his associates, belonged to that type of boy who could have easily stood at the head of his class but preferred to devote his time to base-ball and the extermination of all the rabbits and trout in the neighboring territory. Again, when graduation day came at the end of his college career he was content to be the lowest of his class to receive a degree and bore no malice to the young man who delivered the valedictory address, although Tommy, as well as the professors, knew that it was he who should have had that privilege. It was at Class-Day that he received his reward, for the college student regards laziness as no sin and hates a "grind." And so when Tommy came on the platform that day to close his college life with a few jocular remarks about the president and the professors of his Alma Mater he received such an ovation as the campus had never known before. It was that kind of an ovation that lasts a very long time, and begins with hand-clapping and ends with the men standing on their chairs and cheering and throwing hats high in the air, and the old ladies who have sons of their own and the young ladies who have brothers and sweethearts alternately waving their handkerchiefs aloft and drying their eyes. There were even gray-haired professors that day who were afterward accused of having joined in a college yell. For four years Tommy Carter had stood for all that was honest and clean in sport and out of it. On the field he was all grit and fight, but when the game was over there seemed to be nothing left but a woman's heart and a hand that was forever being held out to someone. Whatever the stress and however heavy the weather, the sun, at least for Tommy, was always shining. He joked about the bad coffee at breakfast, and in the classroom a problem in trigonometry was not without its element of humor, and at night he turned low the wick of his midnight oil and went about from room to room, staying just long enough to smoke a pipe, tell a few stories, and thoroughly corrupt any idea of serious study.

The Cinderella Club held their Christmas Eve dinner at a rather elaborate shooting-box several miles from the town. The event was so well known that no other member would have visited the club-house that night even had he felt inclined to do so, and

so the five men always had the whole place to themselves, and used it entirely as they saw fit. Of course the dinner itself was the chief event. The table was spread in the hall, which formed the body of the house, and the steward always arranged that the feast should be worthy of the occasion. The menu never varied—there was a special lot of oysters from Massachusetts and a crate of terrapin from Maryland, while the clear soup and the roast pig were of home production. And then to top off with there was a blazing pudding carried in by the chief steward, who proudly held himself responsible for its being. As an accompaniment to all this, there were special vintages of wines carefully sought out by four of the members during the year and subscribed to the feast as personal offerings. The fifth member was Tommy, and to him was allowed the honor of supplying the punch—a most wonderful concoction of his own brew and a fitting climax to a feast worthy of the club and the Yuletide season, when all else must give way to good cheer.

After the dinner was over and the room had become sufficiently dense with gray-blue tobacco smoke and the servants had been dismissed, each member made a little speech in which was combined all the humor he had accumulated during the past year and each ended with a toast, usually of an intimate and sentimental quality. This function over, the members adjourned to the end of the room, where a curtain was withdrawn, disclosing a miniature Christmas tree laden with more or less humorous gifts from each of the members to the four others, and in addition there were real gifts for the wives at home which came in sealed packages and which were carried home unbroken. The tree was the last of the formalities, and this once ended, the old friends sat about the fireplace and told stories or followed Tommy Carter to the piano and joined in the choruses of their college life or listened to him sing the comic songs of the present day. And so for a few hours the men of business forgot their cares and responsibilities and for the nonce became boys again. But as the town clock struck midnight the sleighs were ordered (for this was one of those happy towns where they always have a white Christmas) and the five friends said their good-nights and started for their homes. That the

members had never failed to bring their reunion to a happy close at twelve o'clock was their proudest boast and was the tradition which had given the club its present name.

The meeting just ended had been voted by all to have been the most entirely successful celebration the club had ever known. The spirit of good-fellowship and loyalty had seemed just a little more evident than ever before and merriment ran high from the very first of the dinner until Tommy had finished his last song and closed down the piano on the stroke of midnight. Always the chief merrymaker and the real life of the meetings, he had on this occasion far outshone any of his previous efforts. His speech, which was always the last because it was sure to be the best, was full of the wit and anecdote and gentle satire which had made him famous at college and had given him his present unique position as an after-dinner speaker, and when he came to his toast, which was to the ladies, he turned from humor to a certain sweet pathos—a gentle appreciation of the wives at home who had in their hearts a blind confidence in the significance of Christmas Day, and who were even then decorating the trees and making such preparations that their sleeping children should awake on the morrow and learn to look upon it as the one day of all the year. And after dinner was over it was Tommy who told the best of the stories and led the choruses and sang the latest songs in his own inimitable way. One of the members, the President of the bank in which Tommy was employed, believed that he, at least, could account for the great exuberance of his receiving teller. The bank happened to be one of those institutions which pay moderate salaries and give large Christmas presents to their employees. The past year had been one of unusual prosperity, and the directors had decided to give the employees a whole year's salary as a gift instead of the twenty-five or fifty per cent. which had always been the custom. And so just before the dinner had been served the President had called Tommy aside and had presented him with an envelope containing four crisp one thousand dollar notes, which in itself seemed to the President to supply ample excuse for Carter's excess of high spirits.

On his return home Tommy had told his young wife of the unexpectedly large gift from the bank directors, and then after a brief description of the events of the annual banquet had gone to bed, apparently as happy and content as he had ever been in his life. The next morning after breakfast the Carters exchanged their Christmas gifts, and among the rest Tommy gave his wife two of the four thousand-dollar notes and asked her to deposit them to her own account and to spend it when and how she saw fit. They had no children of their own, but Mrs. Carter always dressed a tree for some of the poorer children in the neighborhood and Tommy acted as master of ceremonies at the distribution of the candy and toys. This he did as usual, but when once his duty had been performed he complained of not feeling well and protested that the noisy excitement of the children annoyed him. He put on his hat and overcoat, and having kissed his wife, told her that he was going out for a long walk in the cool air.

Mrs. Carter could not understand why her husband did not come back to lunch, and after waiting for his return until late in the afternoon she sent for one of his men friends who had been with him the night previous and told him of her husband's unaccountable disappearance. The clubs and every resort where Tommy was known were searched, but no trace of him could be found. That night there was a meeting of the Cinderella Club at his home, and Mrs. Carter took the place of her husband. Women who are brought up in ease and comparative luxury and who always have had everything done for them all their lives have occasionally a way of rising to a crisis in a way that surprises and dumfounds men who have been trained to take the initiative. That is the kind of woman Mrs. Carter proved herself to be, and she rose to the crisis of her life with all the strength that often lies so long dormant in the fibre of a fine woman. It was the wife who arranged the conduct of the search for her husband; it was she who requested that an immediate investigation be made of his affairs at the bank, and it was she who demanded that the police confine their operations to the limits of the town in which he had lived. Under ordinary circumstances, she argued that he would not have left the city without telling her, and if he had met

with foul play the act must have occurred in his own town. If, on the other hand, he had voluntarily left his home, then it was not for her to ask to have him brought back. That he was laboring under any delusion or that his mind was in any way affected was not for a moment considered, by either his wife or his friends. He had not led the life of the man who becomes insane and the idea of suicide would be the last to have occurred to him.

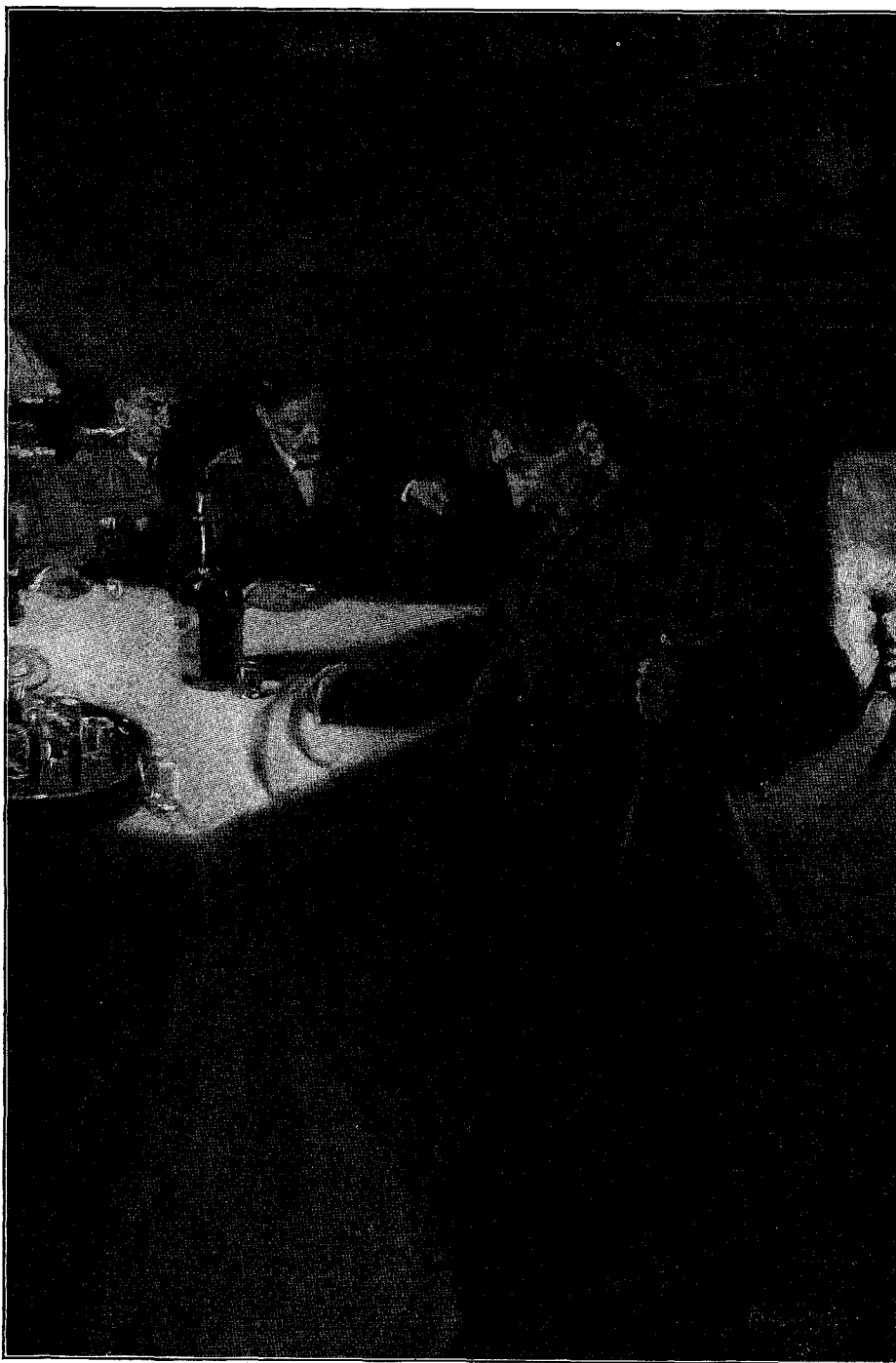
Tommy Carter had disappeared from his home and apparently from the face of the earth just as completely as if he had died and been buried. The police could find no clue and his friends and family no possible reason for his absence. His books at the bank were in perfect order and his home life was without a flaw. If he had not made a great deal of money in his short business career, it had been largely due to the fact that he found so much happiness and contentment in life without riches. His loss in a social way, at least, was of much import in his own town, for he was a man who was beloved by everyone who knew him, and there were very few, rich or poor, who did not know him. There were many theories advanced and denied and refuted, and several times there came reports of his having been seen in different cities in the East, but the rumors were never authenticated and Mrs. Carter always refused to have them investigated. If she had a theory herself it is quite certain she had never told anyone—not even her husband's best friends, who had proved her best friends, too, and who had watched over her with the care of a father for his own child. Carter's place at the bank had been temporarily taken by another and the honorary positions he held in the city life had gradually become filled. But everyone knew that there was one place that was not filled and never would be, and that was Tommy's place in his own home. They called her "the Widow" now, and even although she never spoke of Tommy they knew that every night and every morning she hoped and longed and prayed that he would come back and with a word explain it all away and begin life over again, not a better life, but just the same old life he had broken off that Christmas morning.

And so the weeks and months passed on, and there came another Christmas Eve and

the Cinderella Club met once more at the shooting-box, and for the first time, although there were places at the table for five, only four of the members sat down to the dinner. It may have been the stormy weather that had affected the spirits of the members, or it may have been the empty chair at the table, but whatever it was, the dinner lacked the spontaneous gayety and the unrestrained laughter of former years. Had the four members been quite sure that Tommy Carter was dead and decently buried by the side of his forefathers, it might have been different, but it was the thought that he might still be alive that made the sight of the empty glasses hurt. Outside the wind whistled through the deserted piazzas and through the windows they could see the snow driven along in great clouds across the open country. Inside there came from the broad stone fireplace a splendid warmth and a fine orange light which filled the room from the heavy rafters to the polished floor, and the shaded candles on the table threw a warm glow over the heavy damask and the disordered mass of silver and glass of the finished dinner.

The men were sipping their coffee and had lit their cigars when the president of Tommy's bank rose to make his little speech and propose a toast. As if by mutual consent not a word had been spoken all evening of the absent member, but now the servants had left the room and it was in the air that the silence on the subject so near to all their hearts would be broken.

"We have all done our best," began the bank president, "to carry off this annual dinner with the good-will and the fun which have always added so much to the previous efforts of our little club. And, as we all know deep down in our hearts, we have signally failed, and we have failed through no fault of our own. No dinner without Tommy Carter could be quite the same as one with him. Were we at all certain that he is no longer among the living I am quite sure that the one toast of the evening would be to his memory. But we are not sure that he is dead. I, at least, wish I were sure of it. I have tried very hard to imagine circumstances which would make the desertion of his wife and his friends possible, even excusable, and I have failed. But my lost love and admiration for the man, and I am sure I speak for all of you,



Drawn by N. C. Wyeth.

He glanced furtively at the faces of the four men about him.—Page 718.

has but been added to my devotion and love for 'the Widow.' There is no act of kindness and sympathy of which the old friends of her husband could be capable which she has not proved to be her rightful inheritance. As we have missed him to-night, so has she suffered every day and every night, and so my toast is to the best of women—'the Widow.'"

The men pushed back their chairs and rising lifted their glasses, and as they did so the door was pushed wide open and Tommy Carter shuffled in.

For a moment he stopped to close the door against the piercing wind and the flying snow of the storm. Then he walked over to the fireplace and stood there shivering in the light of the burning logs. There seemed to be little left of the Tommy Carter they had known of old. His ragged clothes hung limply on the shrunken figure, and in place of the clean-shaven smiling face there was a rough, uncouth beard, and his skin was parched and tightly drawn.

The four men resumed their seats and watched the miserable figure at the fireplace gradually thaw out and return to a semblance of the living. With a shambling gait, Tommy approached the table and dropped into the vacant chair. One of the men shoved a bottle of whiskey in front of him and he poured out half a tumbler of the liquor and partly raised it to his parched lips. Some of the old light came into his eyes as he looked into the tumbler and his features broke into the ghastly semblance of a smile. Then he nodded his head, and putting the glass on the table, he glanced furtively at the faces of the four men about him.

"I guess I won't drink that yet," he whispered.

"Carter," said the bank president, "we were just about to drink the health of one who in the time of unusual adversity has proved herself a very remarkable woman. I mean your wife."

Carter nodded and pushed the glass of whiskey a little farther from him. For a few moments there was silence, which was finally broken by the president.

"Have you anything to tell us, Carter?"

"I know what you mean," said Tommy; "you mean has the prisoner anything to say before you pass sentence. I understand. I'm the prisoner, and you are the judge and

jury. Well, that's why I'm here. I've given myself up and I want to tell my story; but don't make any mistake—it's not a defence."

Carter, with his elbows resting heavily on the table, began to talk in a whisper, but as he continued his voice gained in volume and power, and as the huskiness disappeared there came back the old tones in the voice his friends had loved so well.

"A year ago to-night," he began, "I drove home from here in one of your sleighs, and when the owner got out at his place the coachman took me to my cottage around the corner. I don't know why, but for the first time in my life I resented the use of another man's horse and I resented his fine house. My own little place seemed absurdly small and inadequate, and after my wife had gone to bed I sat alone smoking and hating everything about me. I hated the things actually in the room, and I hated even the vacant spaces because I wanted to fill them with things I couldn't afford to buy. I hated the poor growing plants I had bought for my wife for Christmas and I could have wrung the neck of the canary who kept singing cheerfully although he was in a cage. For five hours I had been making you all happy; for five hours I had been master, and I imagined I knew the thought that had been in every one of your minds that night. You all wondered that in my life I had not taken advantage of the brains that God had given me instead of being left behind by every fool that wanted to pass me. There was never a man who all through his life has had greater success predicted for him than I have had, and there is no one who has failed so absolutely. You know how it was at school, and you know how it was at college, and you know, God help me, how it has been since then. It was I who was to have the success; and yet when the race began it was I who stood by and watched you all pass me one by one and leave me far behind. Away from my own home I had known success—when I lived in the outside world I had been somebody—at least so it seemed to me that night—and I decided that I would go away into a world that knew my worth and where I should get my deserts. The love of my wife and my friends had left me, and in its place had come a great longing to play a big part in the big world. Before I went to bed I



Drawn by N. C. Wyeth.

"And I cursed the men who grinned at me across the table."—Page 720.

prayed that God would take away this ambition and that I would wake on the morrow with only the old spirit of happiness and content.

"It was not the first time; the same thought had come to me before; but it never took hold as it did that night. It gripped me like a vise and urged me on to make good the unfilled promise of the past. I chafed under my own failure and I was jealous of your success—yes, the success of you four—the best friends a man ever had. I wanted to be to you in all things—as I had been that Christmas Eve—your master."

Carter pulled himself to his feet and a strange light burned in his fevered eyes—the same light that had flamed up a year before and driven him out into the world.

"And the next day," he ran on, "the hatred of the things about me was still strong, and the thought uppermost in my mind was to get away—away to the broad life that was waiting for me. And so I left my home, as you know, and I went in search of something big and great, and yet something I could not define even in my own mind—perhaps it was power, or it may have been fame or great wealth—I don't know—but it was something which my life lacked and something that a new spirit in me craved."

Carter suddenly broke into a violent fit of coughing, and falling back into his chair laid his head on his arms, which were stretched out on the table in front of him. The four men sat silent and pityingly watched the emaciated frame shake convulsively under the folds of the ragged suit of clothes. The man sitting at his right put the glass of whiskey in front of Carter, but he pushed it away and started in again, very slowly, to finish his story.

"And what did I find? What did I find? I found the freedom of the escaped convict. Money, I had in plenty, and everything I touched turned into gold. I tried stocks and I went to the races and I gambled, and I bet my money like a drunken sailor, and I always won. That was good, because I needed a great deal of money those days. I was forever travelling—always moving on in the hope that I would find the big life—the high place that was waiting for me. I had never known what it was to have 'easy' money before, but now

my pockets were bulging with it, and I spent it as freely as it came, and yet it brought me nothing. I chased on from town to city, and afterward from one country to another—my eyes were blinded by the colors of the rainbow always in front of me and my dogged brain hurried me on in my search for the pot of gold. And then one night the good luck which had been my evil companion through all my travels suddenly left me—left me alone, friendless and miserable. Budapest was the name of the place. I had lost heavily all day at the races, and I tried to win it back at night at a gambling club, and I lost and lost. The cards were human things, cruel human things, that reached out and took my money from me and laughed at me. The damned things had no mercy and they took it away from me—everything. And then I cursed them and I cursed the men who grinned at me across the green table. They were poor foreign things with short pointed beards and turned-up mustaches and little decorations in the lapels of their coats, and their fingers were covered with jewels, the fingers that took my money from me, and I cursed them out for thieves and blackguards. They threw me into the street, and I groped my way along until I came to a café where there was a regular blaze of lights and the men and women were sitting about little tables and laughing loud and singing with the band. For a time I sat with them, and in the cool night air my brain got clearer, and I saw things as they really were. In place of beauty I found paint and powder and rouge, and the women smiled like monkeys and the poor wizened men showed their gold and their bank-notes as if to prove they were really men, and the music itself was tainted with the desire for things which are only material. The whole place breathed of passion and excess and unrest, and it seemed as if the world had returned to the state of animals.

"The next day, with the help of the consul, I got light work on a boat that started me in the direction of my own land. The rainbow had gone—and in its place there was nothing left but a great desire for home and rest and the peace and the content which could never again be mine. There is no use in telling you what happened after this—you can see for yourselves.

It was bad enough to suffer as I have suffered, but it isn't the body that hurts—it's the mind—I tell you it's the mind."

Carter put his hand to his head and slowly pulled himself out of his chair.

"I don't want any of you to think I came here for your sympathy, or your aid, but I just wanted you to know. If there was one place in the world where I might find an empty chair waiting for me I knew that it would be here. If I had opened that door to-night and had found this place filled—I thank you for that, boys, anyhow."

"I think you had better have that drink now," said one of the men.

Carter stopped on his way to the door and held up his hand protestingly; "Not yet," he said, "not yet. I've got something else to do. I'm going to town." He slowly shuffled to the door and went out in the storm. The four men silently rose from the table and looked out of the windows on the great white landscape. The road marked by the heavy drifts lay deep in snow, and along it they watched the solitary figure of Carter fighting against the storm on his way to the town.

At the stroke of twelve the annual outing of the club was officially brought to an end and the four remaining members climbed into their sleigh and started to plough their way back home over the snow-filled roads. The bank president held the reins, and no one expressed surprise or curiosity when he turned into the street at the end of which stood "the Widow's" cottage. It was not necessary to go all the way, for from afar off they saw that the little house was aglow with the light of welcome

and good cheer, and they knew that the prodigal had returned. The bank president suddenly turned the horses and drew the long whip sharply across their backs. "God bless her!" he said; "and Tommy too—damn him!"

It does not take good or bad news very long to reach the farthestmost quarters of a small city, and by ten o'clock the next day everyone in town was talking of Tommy Carter's return. And although it was Christmas Day, and no one seemed to have very much in particular to do, there were no visitors at "the Widow's" cottage. There seemed to be a general understanding that the day and Tommy belonged just to her. As a matter of fact, the bank president did drop in during the evening, but it was only for a moment—just long enough to tell Carter his place was waiting for him at the bank. And the next day there was a long line of depositors which all through the morning passed slowly in front of the receiving-teller's window. There were old business men with a pocket full of checks and young clerks with little black satchels and poor old ladies and rich young ladies and many little children, all with gold pieces and crisp bank-notes which the real Santa Claus or just some modern Kriss Kingle had given them the day before. And as everyone in that long line approached Carter's desk they rehearsed the few remarks they had prepared, but it so happened that not one of these little speeches of welcome was ever made. But as a compromise each old man or young woman or little child just reached through the window and squeezed Tommy's hand.



WILLIAM, ALFY, AND HENRY JOHN

By Guy Wetmore Carryl

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAY WILSON PRESTON

THE big house stands upon a rise of ground, commanding a tolerable stretch of country; the gardener's cottage is back of its imposing neighbor, and further down the slope, and impresses even an unimaginative observer as having a deprecatory air, the air of a dependent—which, indeed, it is.

I have travelled a good bit, and seen a number of people who are or have been counted famous, and, among these, not a few who, by reason of an exalted position, a lofty manner, or a brilliant dress, were signally impressive; but even so, I found Mrs. Enoch Blake imposing at the first glance, and never met her thereafter without a sensation of respect. It was not remarkable, therefore, that upon William, Alfie, and Henry John that lady's presence should have produced an effect nothing short of stupefying. Mrs. Enoch Blake was a charming and sufficiently wealthy widow of my acquaintance, who lived in the big house aforementioned, and William, Alfie, and Henry John were her gardener's sons.

There were so many good points about Mrs. Blake that it would be sheer folly to attempt their enumeration; but she had no eye for her inferiors. Other people, and, in particular, your scientist, your author, and your painter, pride themselves upon the amount of things they contrive to see in going through the world; but Mrs. Enoch Blake plumed herself upon the people she managed *not* to see—a curious vanity! Her use of an elaborate gold lor-

nette was so constant that she might fairly have been said to wear, rather than simply to carry, it, and was not, as might be surmised, designed primarily to reënforce a de-

fective vision, but, quite as much, to emphasize the superb hauteur of her demeanor. It was only the envious among her acquaintances who compared her on this account to a basilisk or Gorgon, although I not infrequently heard it done. Not the least of her good points were two daughters so charming that I should infallibly have made an offer for the pair if I had been so fortunate as to be born twins, but between whom, as it was, I was unable to decide; a miniature Eden of a country-place; three capital saddle-horses; and a thoroughly initiated, if somewhat formal, theory and practice of hospitality. In short, Mrs. Enoch Blake was a lady whose tolerance (since I hardly expected to get much farther) I thought it very well worth a bachelor's while to cultivate. I had done so assiduously for close upon six years, and

was regularly invited, once a quarter, to spend Sunday, and, at Thanksgiving, to pass a week.

I have more than once reflected upon the incongruity of the supposition that Mrs. Blake and her dozen or more servants were created equal. That she in person should ever have engaged them; that from time to time she should instruct, command, or reprove them, in the performance of their duties; that, in brief, she was so much as aware in any respect of their existence,



To emphasize the superb hauteur of her demeanor.