THE Masquerader

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON,
Author of "The Circle," Etc.

Copyright, 1904, by Harper & Brothers

CHAPTER XVII—(Continued.)

"I saw it all. I lived with it all till I grew hard and indifferent—till I acquiesced in your 'heroes' as readily as the rest of the world that hadn't suspected and didn't know." Again she laughed nervously. "And I thought the indifference would last forever. If one lives in a groove for years, one gets frozen up. I never felt more frozen than on the night Mr. Friede spoke to me of you—asked me to use my influence; then, on that night"—

"Yes. On that night?" Loder's voice was tense.

But her excitement had evidently fallen. Whether the glance had quelled it or whether the force of her feelings had worked itself out in was impossible to say, but her eyes and lost their emotion. She stood hesitating for a moment, then she turned and moved to the mantelpiece.

"That night you found me changed?" Loder was insistent.

"Changed—and yet not changed." She spoke reluctantly, with averted head.

"And what did you think?"

Again she was silent. Then again a faint excitement tinged her cheeks.

"I thought"— she began. "It seemed"— Once more she paused, hampered by her own uncertainty, her own sense of puzzling incongruity. "I don't know why I speak like this," she went on at last, as if in justification of herself, "or why I want to speak. But a feeling—an extraordinary, incongruous, irresistible feeling seems to urge me on. The same feeling that came to me on the day we had tea together—the feeling that made me—that almost made me believe"—

"Believe what?" The words emerged like without volition.

At sound of his voice she turned. "Believe that a miracle happened," she said; "that you had found strength, and freed yourself."

"From morphia?"

"From morphia."

In the silence that followed Loder lived through a century of suggestion and introspection. His first feeling was for himself, but his first clear thought was for Chilcote and they conquest. He stood, metaphorically, on a stone in the middle of a stream, balancing on one foot, then on the other, fearing to fall back, then to the left. At last, as it always did, inspiration came to him slowly. He realized that by one glimpse he might save both Chilcote and himself.

He crossed swiftly to the fireplace and stood by Eve. "You were right in your belief," he said. "For all that time, from the night you spoke to me of Friede to the day you had tea in this room, I never touched a drug."

She moved suddenly, and he saw her face. "John," she said excitedly, "you—I—I have known you to lie to me about other things."

With a hasty movement he arrested his head. The double, the appeal in her words, shocked him. The whole institution of her life seemed summed up in the one short sentence. For the instant he forgot Chilcote. With a rebellion of feeling he turned to her again.

"Look at me!" he said brusquely.

She raised her eyes.

"Do you believe I'm speaking the truth?"

She searched his eyes intently, the doubt and hesitancy still struggling in her face.

"But the last three weeks?" she said reluctantly. "How can you ask me to believe?"

He had expected this and he met it steadily enough. Nevertheless his courage faltered. To deceive this woman, even to justify himself, had in the last half hour become something unthinkable.

"The last three weeks must be buried," he said hurriedly. "No man could free himself suddenly from—from a vice." He broke off abruptly. He hated Chilcote; he hated himself. Then Eve's face, raised in distressed appeal, overwhelmed all scruples. "You have been silent and patient for years," he said suddenly. "Can you be patient and silent a little longer?" He spoke without consideration. His was unserious of no selfishness beneath his words. In the first exercise of conscious strength the primitive desire to reduce all elements to his own sovereignty submerged every other emotion. "I can't enter into the thing," he said; "like you, I give no explanations. I can only tell you that on the day we talked together in this room I was myself—in the full possession of my reason, the full knowledge of my own capacities. The man you have known in the last three weeks, the man you have imagined in the last four years, is a shadow, an unreality—a weakness in human form. There is a new Chilcote—if you will only see him."

Eve was trembling as he ceased; her face was flushed; there was a strange brightness in her eyes. She was moved beyond herself.

"But the other you—the old you?"

"You must be patient." He looked down into the fire. "Times like the last three weeks will come again—must come again; they are inevitable. When they do come, you must shut your eyes—you must blind yourself. You must ignore them and me. Is it a compact?" He still avoided her eyes.

She turned to his quietly. "Yes—if you wish it," she said below her breath.

He was conscious of her glance, but dared not meet it. He felt sick at the part he was playing, yet he held to it tenaciously.

"I wonder if you could do what few men and fewer women are capable of?" he asked at last. "I wonder if you could learn to live in the present?" He lifted his head slowly and met her eyes. "This is an experiment," he went on. "And, like all experiments, it has good phases and bad. When the bad phases come around I—I want you to tell yourself that you are not altogether alone in your unhappiness—that I am suffering too—in another way."

There was silence when he had spoken, and for a space it seemed that Eve would make no response. Then she turned suddenly and moved to the door.

"No, I haven't got the right."

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To my room."

He crossed the room and opened the door for her. She passed out without looking at him, and he closed it behind her. Then he returned to the fire and stood there motionless, his head bowed, his hands clenched behind his back.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT night for almost the first time since he had adopted his dual rôle Loder slept ill. He was not a man over whom imagination held any powerful sway. His doubts and misgivings seldom ran to speculation upon future possibilities. Nevertheless, the fact that, consciously or unconsciously, he had adopted a new attitude toward Eve came home to him with unpleasant force during the hours of darkness, and long before the first hint of daylight had slipped through the heavy window curtains he had arranged a plan of action—a plan wherein, by the simple method of altogether avoiding her, he might soothe his own conscience and safeguard Chilcote's domestic interests.

It was a satisfactory if a somewhat negative arrangement, and he rose next morning with a feeling that things had begun to shape themselves. But chance sometimes has a disconcerting knack of forestalling even our best planned schemes. He dressed slowly and descended to his solitary breakfast with the pleasant sensation of having put last night out of consideration by the turning over of a new leaf, but scarcely had he opened Chilcote's letters, scarcely had he taken a cursory glance at the morning's newspaper than it was borne in upon him that not only a new leaf, but a whole sheaf of new leaves, had been turned in his prospects by a hand infinitely more powerful and arbitrary than his own. He realized within the space of a few moments that the leisure Eve might have claimed, the leisure he might have been tempted to devote to her, was no longer his to dispose of, being already demanded of him from a quarter that allowed of no refusal.

For the first rumbling to the political earthquake that was to shake the country made itself audible beyond doubt on that morning of March 27 when the news spread through England that, in view of the disorganized state of the Persian army and the sheik's consequent inability to suppress the open insurrection of the border tribes in the northeastern districts of Meshed, Russia, with a great show of magnanimity, had come to the rescue by dispatching a large armed force from her military station at Merv across the Persian frontier to the seat of the disturbance.

To many hundreds of Englishmen who read their papers on that morning this announcement conveyed but little. That there is such a country as Persia we all know, that English interests predominate in the south and Russian interests in the north we have all superficially understood from childhood, but in this knowledge, coupled with the fact that Persia is comfortingly far away, we are apt to rest content. It is only to the eyes that see through long distance glasses, the minds that regard the present as nothing more or less than an inevitable line joining the future to the past, that this distant, debatable land stands out in its true political significance.

To the average reader of news the statement of Russia's move seemed scarcely more important than had the first report of the border risings in January, but to the men who had watched the growth of the disturbance it came charged with portentous meaning. Through the entire ranks of the opposition, from Friede himself downward, it caused a thrill of expectation—that peculiar prophetic sensation that every politician has experienced at some moment of his career.

In no member of his party did this feeling of challenge rise more than in Loder. Imbued with a lifelong interest in the eastern question, specially equipped by personal knowledge to hold and proclaim an opinion upon Persian affairs, he read the signs and portents with unerring insight. Seated at Chilcote's table, surrounded by Chilcote's letters and papers, he forgot the breakfast that was slowly growing cold, forgot the numerous and dangers, personal or pleasurable, of the night before, while the mental eyes persistently conjured up the map of Persia, traveling with steady deliberation from Merv to Meshed, from Meshed to Herat, from Herat to the empire of India. For it was not the fact that the Russians had risen against the sheik that occupied the thinking mind, nor was it the fact that Russian and not Persian troops were descended to subdue them, but the deeply important consideration that an armed Russian force had crossed the frontier and was encamped within twenty miles of Meshed—Meshed, upon which no single Russian eye had rested ever since the days of Peter the Great.

So Loder's thoughts ran as he read and pieced the news from the varying political standpoints, and as they concerned no one person, some hours later an urgent telephone message from the St. George's Gazette acted him to call at Lakeley's office.

The message was interesting as well as surprising, and he made no instant response. The thought of Lakeley's keen eyes and shrewd enthusiasms always possessed strong attractions for his own slower temperament, but even had this impetus been lacking, the knowledge that at the St. George's offices, if anywhere, the true feelings of the party were invariably voiced would have drawn him without hesitation.

It was scarcely 12 o'clock when he turned the corner of the tall building, but already the keen spirit that Lakeley everywhere diffused was making itself felt. Loder smiled to himself as his eyes fell on the day's placards with their uncompromising headings and passed onward from the string of gayly painted carts drawn up to receive their first consignment of the paper to the troop of eager newsboys passing in and out of the big swing doors with their piled up bundles of the early edition, and with a renewed thrill of anticipation and energy he passed through the doorway and ran upstairs. Pausing unchallenged through the long corridor that led to Lakeley's office, he caught a fresh impression of action and vitality from the click of the tape machines in the subeditor's office, and a glimpse through the open door of the subeditors themselves, each occupied with his particular task; then without time for further observation he found himself at Lakeley's door. Without waiting to knock, as he had felt compelled to do on the one or two previous occasions that business had brought him there, he immediately turned the handle and entered the room.

Editors' offices differ but little in general effect. Lakeley's surroundings were rather more elaborate than is usual, as became the dignity of the oldest Tory evening paper, but the atmosphere was unmistakable. As Loder entered he glanced up from the desk at which he was sitting, but instantly returned to his task of looking through and making a pile of early evening editions that were spread around him. His coat was off and hung on the chair behind him, and he pulled vigorously on a long cigar.

"Hello! That's right," he said hospitably. "Make yourself comfortable half a second, while I skim the St. Stephen's."

His salutation pleased Loder. With a nod of acquiescence he crossed the office to the brisk fire that burned in the grate.

For a minute or two Lakeley worked steadily, occasionally breaking the quiet by an unintelligible remark or a vigorous stroke of his pencil. At last he dragged the paper with a gesture of satisfaction and leaned back in his chair.

"Well," he said, "what d'you think of this? How's Lee for a complication?"

Loder turned round. "I think," he said quietly, "that we can't overestimate it."

Lakeley laughed and took a long pull at his cigar. "And we mustn't be afraid to let the Sedborough crowd know it, eh?" He waved his hand to the poster of the first edition that hung before his desk.

Lodor, following his glance, smiled.

Lakeley laughed again. "They might have known it all along if they'd cared to declare," he said. "Did they really believe that Russia was going to sit calmly looking across the Black-End while the sheik played at mouthing? But what became of you last night? We had a regular prophesying of the whole business at Brundell's; the great Friede looked in for five minutes. I went on with him to the club afterward and was there when the news came in. 'Twas a great night!"

Lodor's face lighted up. "I can imagine it," he said, with an unusual touch of warmth.

Lakeley watched him keenly for a moment. Then with a quick action he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk.

"It's going to be something more than imagination for you, Chilcote," he said impressively. "It's going to be solid earnest." He spoke rapidly and with rather more than his usual shrewd decisiveness; then he paused to see the effect of his announcement.

Lodor was still studying the facing poster. At the writer's words he turned sharply. Something in Lakeley's voice, something in his manner, arrested him. A tinge of color crossed his face.

"Reality?" he said. "What do you mean?"

For a further space his companion watched him, then with a rapid movement he tilted back his chair.

"Ten," he said. "Ten; old Friede's instincts are never far out. He's quite right. They're the same."

Still quietly, but with a strange misgiving of excitement, Lodor left the fire and, coming forward, took a chair at Lakeley's desk.

"Do you mind telling me what you're driving at?" he asked in his old, low tone.

Lakeley still scrutinized him with an air of brisk satisfaction; then with a gesture of finality he tossed his cigar away.

"My dear chap," he said, "there's going to be a French somewhere—and Friede says you're the man to step in and fill it! You see, five years ago, when things looked truly on the gulf and the Sandar Abbas business came to light, you did some promising work, and a reputation like that sticks to a man even when he turns slacker. I won't deny that you've shirked abominably," he added as Lodor made an uneasy movement, "but slacking has different effects. Some men run to seed, others mature. I had almost put you down on the 'Don't list, but I've altered my mind in the last two months."

Again Lodor stirred in his seat. A host of emotions were stirring in his mind. Every word wrung from Lakeley was another stimulus to pride, another subtle tribute to the curious force of personality.

"Well?" he said. "Well?"

Lakeley smiled. "We all know that Sedborough's ministry is—well, sophistry," he said. "Sedborough is building his card house just a story too high. It's a toss up what'll upset the balance. It might be the army, of course, or it might be education, but it might quite as well be a matter of foreign policy."

They looked at each other in comprehensive silence.

"You know as well as I that it's not the question of whether Russia comes into Persia, but the question of whether Russia goes out of Persia when these Hamrus are subdued! I'll lay you what you like, Chilcote, that within one week we hear that the risings are suppressed, but that Russia, instead of retiring, has advanced three tempting twenty miles and comfortably encamped herself at Meshed—as she encamped herself on the island of Ashurada." Lakeley's nervous, energetic figure was bending, his light blue eyes brightened by the intensity of his interest.

"If this news comes before the Easter recess," he went on, "the first mail can be hammered in on the motion for adjournment. And if the right man does it in the right way I'll lay my life 'twill be a nail in Sedborough's coffin."

Lodor sat very still. Overwhelming possibilities had suddenly opened before him. In a moment the unreality of the past months had become real; a tangible justification of himself and his imposture was suddenly made possible. In the stress of understanding he, too, leaned forward, and, resting his elbows on the desk, took his face between his hands.

For a space Lakeley made no remark. To him man and man's moods came second in interest to his paper and his party politics. That Chilcote should be conscious of the glories he had opened up seemed only natural; that he should show that consciousness in a becoming gravity seemed only right. For some seconds he made no attempt to disturb him, but at last his own irrepressible activity made silence unendurable. He caught up his pencil and tapped impatiently on the desk.

"Chilcote," he said quickly and with a gleam of sudden anxiety, "you're not by any chance doubtful of yourself?"

At sound of his voice Lodor lifted his face. It was quite pale again, but the energy and resolution that had come into it when Lakeley first spoke were still to be seen.

"No, Lakeley," he said very slowly, "it's not the sort of moment in which a man doubts himself."

CHAPTER XIX.

AND so it came to pass that Lodor was freed from one responsibility to undertake another. From the morning of March 27, when Lakeley had expounded the political programme in the offices of the St. George's Gazette, to the afternoon of April 1 he found himself a central figure in the whirlpool of activity that formed itself in Conservative circles.

With the acumen for which he was noted Lakeley had touched the keystone of the situation on that morning, and succeeding events, each brought with its own importance, had established the precision of his forecast.

Minutely watchful of Russia's attitude, Friede quietly organized his forces and strengthened his position with a commendable group of opportunity, and to Lodor the attributes displayed by his leader during those trying days formed an endless and absorbing study. Setting the thought of Chilcote aside, ignoring his own position and the risks he daily ran, he had fully yielded to the glamour of the moment and in the first freedom of a loose rein he had given unreservedly all that he possessed of activity, capacity and determination to the cause that had claimed him.

Singularly privileged in a constant personal contact with Friede, he learned many valuable lessons of tact and organization in those five vital days during which the tactics of a whole party hung upon one item of news from a country thousands of miles away. For should Russia subdue the insurgent Hamrus and, laden with the honors of the pacemaker, retire across the frontier, then the political arena would remain undisturbed, but should the all important movement predicted by Lakeley become an accepted fact before parliament rose for the Easter recess, then the first blow in the fight that would rage during the impending session must inevitably be struck. In the meantime it was Friede's difficult position to wait and watch and yet preserve his dignity.

It was early in the afternoon of March 31 that Lodor, in response to a long standing invitation, lunched quietly with the Friedes. Being delayed by some communications from Merv, he was a few minutes late in keeping his appointment, and on being shown into the drawing room found the little group of three that was to make up the party already assembled—Friede, Lady Sarah—and Eve. As he entered the room they ceased to speak, and all three turned in his direction.

In the first moment he had a vague impression of responding suitably to Lady Sarah's cordial greeting, but he knew that immediately and unconsciously his eyes turned to Eve, while a quick sense of surprise and satisfaction passed through him at sight of her. For an instant he wondered how she would mark his avoidance of her since their last eventful interview; then, hastily he blamed himself for the passing doubt. For, before all things, he knew her to be a woman of the world.

He took Friede's outstretched hand, and again he looked toward Eve, waiting for her to speak.

She met his glance, but said nothing. Instead of speaking she smiled at him—a smile that was far more reassuring than any words, a smile that in a single second conveyed forgiveness, appreciation and a warm, almost tender sense of sympathy and comprehension. The remembrance of that smile stayed with him long after they were seated at table and far into the future the remembrance of the lunch itself, with its pleasant private sense of satisfaction, was destined to return to him in retrospective moments. The delightful atmosphere of the Friedes' home life had always been a wonder and an enigma to him, but on this day he seemed to grasp its meaning by a new light as he watched Eve often under its influence and felt himself drawn imperceptibly from the position of a speculative outsider to that of an intimate. It was a fresh side to the complex, fascinating life of which Friede was the master spirit.

These reflections had grown agreeably familiar to his mind. The talk, momentarily directed into social channels, was quietly drifting back to the inevitable question of the "situation" that in private moments was never far from their lips, when the event that was to mark and separate that day from those that had preceded it was unceremoniously thrust upon them.

Without announcement or apology, the door was suddenly flung open and Lakeley entered the room.

His face was brimming with excitement, and his eyes flashed. In the first haste of the entry he failed to see that there were ladies in the room and, crossing instantly to Friede, laid an open telegram before him. "This is official sir," he said. Then at last he glanced round the table.

"Lady Sarah!" he exclaimed. "Can you forgive me? But I'd have given a hundred pounds to be the first with this!" He glanced back at Friede.

Lady Sarah rose and stretched out her hand. "Mr. Lakeley," she said, "I more than understand!" There was a thrill in her warm, cordial voice, and her eyes also turned toward her husband.

Of the whole party Friede alone was perfectly calm. He sat very still, his small, thin figure erect and dignified, as his eyes scanned the message that meant so much.

Eve, who had sprung from her seat and passed round the table at sound of Lakeley's news, was leaning over his shoulder reading the telegram with him. At the last word she lifted her head, her face flushed with excitement.

"How splendid it must be to be a man!" she exclaimed, and without premeditation her eyes and Lodor's met.

In this manner came the news from Persia and with it Lodor's definite call. In the momentary stress of action it was impossible that any thought of Chilcote could obtrude itself. Events had followed each other too rapidly, decisive action had been too much thrust upon him, to allow of hesitation, and it was in this spirit, under this vigorous pressure, that he made his attack upon the government on the day that followed Friede's luncheon party.

That indefinable attentiveness, that silent sensation of impending storm, that is as strong an index of the parliamentary atmosphere was very keen on that memorable 1st of April. It was obvious in the crowded benches on both sides of the house, in the calmness of purpose that unerringly made itself felt through the ranks of the opposition and found definite expression in Friede's stiff figure and tightly shut lips, in the unmistakable uneasiness that lay upon the ministerial benches.

But notwithstanding these indications of battle the early portion of the proceedings was unmarked by excitement, being tinged with the purposeless look of vitality that had of late marked all affairs of the Sedborough ministry, and it was not until the adjournment of the house for the Easter recess had at last been moved that the spirit of activity hovering in the air descended and galvanized the assembly into life. It was then, amid a stir of interest, that Lodor slowly rose.

Many curious incidents have marked the speechmaking annals of the house of commons, but it is doubtful whether it has ever been the lot of a member to hear his own voice raised for the first time on a subject of vital interest to his party, having been denied all initial assistance of minor questions asked or unimportant amendments made. Of all those gathered together in the great building on that day, only one man appreciated the difficulty of Lodor's position, and that man was Lodor himself.

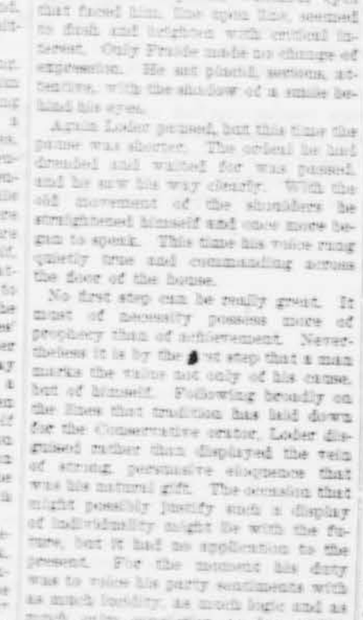
He rose slowly and stood silent for a couple of seconds, his body bowed, his fingers touching the sheaf of notes that lay in front of him. To the waiting house the silence was effective. It might mean consternation or it might mean a failure of nerve at a critical moment. Either possibility had a tinge of poignancy. Moved by the same impulse, fifty pairs of eyes turned upon him with new interest, but up in the ladies' gallery Eve clasped her hands in sudden apprehension, and Friede, sitting stiffly in his seat, turned and shot one swift glance at the man on whom, against prudence and precedent, he had pinned his faith. The glance was swift, but very searching, and with a characteristic movement of his wiry shoulders he resumed the position and his usual grave, attentive attitude. At the same moment Lodor lifted his head and began to speak.

Here at the outset his temperature met him. His voice, pitched too low, only reached those directly near him. It was a moment of great strain. Eve, listening intently, drew a long breath of suspense and let her fingers drop apart. The sleepless, watchful eyes that faced him, the open link, seemed to flash and heighten with critical interest. Only Friede made no change of expression. He sat placid, serious, attentive, with the shadow of a smile behind his eyes.

Again Lodor paused, but this time the pause was shorter. The ordeal he had dreaded and waited for was passed, and he saw his way clearly. With the old movement of the shoulders he straightened himself and once more began to speak. This time his voice rang quietly true and commanding across the floor of the house.

No first step can be really great. It must of necessity possess more of prophecy than of achievement. Nevertheless it is by the first step that a man marks the value not only of his cause, but of himself. Following broadly on the lines that tradition has laid down for the Conservative orator, Lodor disguised rather than displayed the vein of strong, persuasive eloquence that was his natural gift. The occasion that might possibly justify such a display of individuality might be with the future, but it had no application to the present. For the moment his duty was to voice his party sentiments with as much lucidity, as much logic and as much calm conviction as lay within his capacity.

Standing quietly in Chilcote's place, he was conscious with a deep sense of



His voice rang quietly true and commanding.

gravity of the peculiarity of his position, and perhaps it was this unconscious and unrealized seriousness that lent him the tone of weight and judgment so essential to the cause he had in hand. It has always been difficult to arouse the interest of the house in matters of British policy in Persia. Once aroused it may, it is true, reach fever heat with remarkable rapidity, but the introductory stages offer the worst danger to the earnest speaker—the dread of an apathetic audience. But from this consideration Lodor, by his sharp consciousness of personal difficulties, was given immunity.

Pitching his voice in that quiet masterful tone that beyond all others compels attention, he took up his subject and dealt with it with disconcerting force. With great skill he touched on the steady southward advance of Russia into Persian territory from the distant days when, by a curious irony of fate, Russian and British emissaries combined to make entry into the country under the sanction of the great duke of Marlborough to the present hour, when this great power of Russia—her since alienated by interests and desires from her former co-operator—had taken a step which in the eyes of every thinking man must possess a deep significance.

With his usual quiet persistence he pointed out the peculiar position of Meshed in the distant province of Khorassan, its vast distance from the Persian gulf, round which British interests and influence center, and the consequently alarming position of hundreds of traders who, in the security of British sovereignty, are fighting their way upward from India, from Afghanistan, even from England herself.

Following up his point, he dilated on these subjects of the British crown who, cut off from adequate assistance, can only turn in personal or commercial peril to the protective power of the nearest consulate. Then, quietly demanding the attention of his hearers, he marshaled fact after fact to demonstrate the isolation and inadequacy of a consulate so situated; the all but arbitrary power of Russia, who in her new occupation of Meshed had only two considerations to withhold her from open aggression—the knowledge of England as a very considerable, but also a very distant, power, the knowledge of Persia as an imminent, but wholly impotent, factor in the case.

Having stated his opinions, he resorted to the motive of his speech—his desire to put forward a strong protest against the adjournment of the house without an assurance from the government that immediate measures would be taken to safeguard British interests in Meshed and throughout the province of Khorassan.

The immediate outcome of Lodor's speech was all that his party had desired. The effect on the house had been marked, and when, an extraordinary response coming to his demand, he had in still more resolute and decisive terms called for a division on the motion for adjournment, the result had been an appreciable fall in the government majority.

To Lodor himself the realization that he had at last vindicated and justified himself by individual action had a peculiar effect. His position had been altered in one remarkable particular. Before this day he alone had known himself to be strong; now the knowledge was shared by others and he was human enough to be susceptible to the change.

The first appreciation of it came immediately after the excitement of the division, when Friede, slinging his coat, took his arm and pressed it affectionately.

"My dear Chilcote," he said, "we are all proud of you!" Then, looking up into his face, he added, in a grave tone, "but keep your mind upon the future; never be blinded by the present, however bright it seems."

At the touch of his hand, at the spontaneous approval of his first words, Lodor's pulse thrilled, and in a vehement rush of ambition his senses answered to the praise. Then, as Friede in all unconsciousness, added his second sentence, the hot glow of feeling suddenly chilled.

In a sweep of intuitive reaction the meaning and the danger of his falsely real position extinguished his excitement and turned his triumph cold. With an involuntary gesture he withdrew his arm.

"You're very good, sir," he said. "And you're very right. We never should forget that there is—a future."

The old man glanced up, surprised by the tone.

"Quite so, Chilcote," he said kindly. "But we only advise those in whom we believe to look toward it. Shall we find my wife? I know she will want to hear you home with us."

But Lodor's joy in himself and his achievement had dropped from him. He shrank suddenly from Lady Sarah's congratulations and Eve's warm, silent approbation.

"Thanks, sir," he said, "but I don't feel fit for society. A touch of my nerves, I suppose." He laughed shortly. "But do you mind saying to Eve that I hope I have satisfied her?" He added this as if in half reluctant afterthought.

Then, with a short pressure of Friede's hand, he turned, evading the many groups that waited to claim him, and passed out of the house alone.

Hailing a cab, he drove to Grosvenor square. All the exaltation of an hour ago had turned to ashes. His excitement had found its culmination in a sense of futility and premonition.

He met no one in the hall or on the stairs of Chilcote's house, and on entering the study he found that also deserted.

(Continued Next Saturday.)

Sweet Cream at the Palace of Sweets, 35c quart, delivered to any part of the city.