The Ne'er-Do-Well.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.] and are wondering how I heard the news."

"What news?" "Your 'engagement.' " She laughed with an amusement that did not ring quite true.

"You're the second one to speak about that. I'm not engaged." "Of course not. Don't think for a moment I believed it. I was calling on some Spanish people this afternoon and heard the report. I admit it was a shock. When I learned the details I knew at once you ought to be told before it developed into something embar-

rassing. Come into the other room; there is a breeze from the water." She led him into the parlor, from which the open windows, shielded now by drawn shutters, gave egress to the rear porch with its chairs and hammock.

"Dear, dear! You foolish boy, you're always in trouble, aren't you? You really don't deserve to be helped. Why. you have avoided me for weeks." "The new arrangement has swamped

us with work. I have had no time to go out." "Indeed! You had time to run after

the first pretty Spanish face you saw." "You mean Miss Garavel?" "Yes. Didn't you realize what you

were.doing?" "I realized what I was trying to do. But I could understand better what you are talking about if I knew just what this difficulty is."

"Why, this silly 'engagement' of yours. Don't pretend to be so stupid." "Ramon Alfarez heard that same report and very courteously invited me to wait a few minutes while he killed me. It's tremendously flattering to be linked up with Miss Garavel, of course, but I haven't asked her to marry me." "But you've seen her. You have

called at her house." "Sure! Twice. at the invitation of the old gentleman. All the little Garavels were lined up like mourners." "And you dined there last night. Is

that all you have seen of her?" "N-no. I've seen her at Las Savannas. That's why I went hunting so

At this confession, which Kirk delivered with sheepish reluctance, Mrs. Cortlandt drew herself up with an ex-

pression of anger. "Then this has been going on for some time!" she cried. "Why, Kirk, you never told me."

"Why should I?" She flushed at this unconscious brutality, but after a moment ran on bravely: "But why did you let it go so far? Why did you let them commit

"Am I committed?" Her look was half offended, half in- fair?" credulous. "Are you trying to be disagreeable, or is it possible you don't It affected him deeply too. I never saw know the meaning of those invitations | a chap so moved over a little thing." to call and to dine with the family, and marry her. It is all settled now, according to the Spanish custom. The whole town is talking about it."

"Jove! I'm knocked clear off my pins." A tremendous wave of excitement surged over him. "So that's suppose." he said finally. what Alfarez meant. That's what she "What has happened?" meant last night when she told me to look up"— He broke off suddenly, for Edith's face had gone chalk white. "But, Kirk, what about me?" she

asked in a strained voice. There was deathlike silence in the

"You can't love her," said the wom-

an. "Why, she's only a child, and she's-Spanish." They stood motionless, facing each

other. At last Kirk said gravely and deliberately: "Yes, I love her better than anything

in the world, and I want to marry her. I could give up my country, my dadanything for her."

Pressing her gloved fingers to her temples, she turned her head blindly from side to side, whispering as if to herself.

"What will become of me?" "Don't!" he cried in a panic and cast a hurried look over his shoulders. "You'll be overheard. Where's Cort-

landt?" "At his club, I suppose. I don't know-I-don't care. You've been dishonest with me, Kirk."

"Don't act this way," he ordered roughly. "I'm terribly fond of you, but I never knew"-

"You must have known." "I knew nothing. I chose not to think. What I saw I forgot. I supposed you merely liked me as I liked

"You say you didn't know. Then what about that afternoon in the jungle? Oh, you're not blind. You must have seen a thousand times. Every hour we've been alone together I've told you, and you let me go on believing you cared. I have no pride. I am not ashamed. It's too late for shame now. Why, even my husband

knows." With an exclamation he seized her by the arm. "You don't mean that!" he cried flercely. But she wrenched herself away.

"Why do you think I made a man of you? Why did I force you up and up and over the heads of others? Why are you in line for the best position on the railroad? Did you think you had made good by your own efforts?" She laughed harshly. "I took Runnels and Wade and Kimble and the others that you liked and forced them up with you, so you'd have an organization that couldn't be pulled down." "Did-did you do all that?"

"I did more. I broke with Alfarez per and thank him for what he has because of what his son did to you. I juggled the politics of this country, I threw him over and took Garavel-Garavel! My God, what a mockery! But I won't let you-I won't let that girl spoil my work. I fostered this quarrel between Jolson and the superintendent, and I've used Runnels to break trail for you. Why? Ask yourself why! Oh, Kirk," she cried, "you mustn't marry that girl! I'll make it's coming to him, don't you?"

you a great man!" "You seem to forget Cortlandt," he

said dully. She gave a scornful laugh. "You needn't bring Stephen in. He doesn't count. I doubt if he'd even care." "I'm not going to listen to you," he

cried. "I suppose I've been a fool, but this must end right here." "You can't marry that girl," she reiterated, hysterically. She was half sobbing again, but not with the weak-

ness of a woman; her grief was more

like that of a despairing man. "For heaven's sake, pull yourself together," said Kirk. "You have servants. I-I don't know what to say. I want to get out. I want to think it over. I'm-dreadfully sorry. That's all I can seem to think about now." He turned and went blindly to the door, leaving her without a look be-

When he had gone she drew off her riding gloves, removed her hat and dropped them both upon the nearest chair, then crept wearily up the stairs to her room

A moment later the latticed wooden blinds at the end of the parlor swung open, and through the front window stepped Stephen Cortlandt. Behind him was a hammock swung in the coolest part of the balcony. The pupils of his eyes, ordinarily so dead and expressionless, were distended like those of a man under the influence of a drug or suffering from a violent headache. He listened attentively for an instant. his head on one side. then, hearing footsteps approaching from the rear of the house, he strolled into the

A maid appeared with a tray, a glass and a bottle. "I could not find the medicine." she said, "but I brought you some absinthe. It will deaden the pain, sir."

He thanked her and with shaking fingers poured the glass full, then drank it off like so much water. "You're not going out again in the

"Yes. Tell Mrs. Cortlandt that I am

dining at the University club." Kirk never passed a more unpleasant night than the one which followed. In the morning he went straight to Runnels with the statement that he could take no part in the little testimonial they had intended to give Cortlandt.

"But it's too late now to back out. I saw him at the University club last evening and fixed the date for Satur-"Did you tell him I was in the af-

"Certainly. I said it was your idea. Kirk thought quickly. Perhaps Edith

all that? Why, they expect you to had spoken rashly in her excitement and her husband did not know her feelings after all. Perhaps he only suspected. In that case it would never "I hope you're not joking," said Kirk. do to withdraw. It would seem like a confession of guilt. "If he has accepted that ends it, I

"What has happened?" Runnels was watching him sharply.

"Nothing. I merely wish I hadn't entered into the arrangement, that's all. I've ordered a watch for him, too, and it's being engraved. I wanted to give him something to show my own personal gratitude for what he and his wife have done for me. Lord! It took a month's salary. I know it's a jay present, but there's nothing decent in these shops."

"Look here! I've wanted to say something to you for some time, though it's deuced hard to speak of such things. Steve Cortlandt has put us where we are. You understand, when I speak of him I include his wife too. Well, I like him, Kirk, and I'd hate to see him made unhappy. If a chap loves a married woman he ought to be man enough to forget it. Rotten

way to express myself. of course"-Kirk looked the speaker squarely in the eyes as he answered: "I haven't the least interest in any married man's affairs, never have had, in fact. I'm in love with Gertrudis Garavel, and I'm engaged to marry her." "The devil!"

"It's a fact. I didn't know until last night that I'd been accepted."

"Then just forget what I said. was going north on a south bound track-I ran ahead of orders. I really do congratulate you, old man. Miss Garavel is-well, I won't try to do her justice-I had no idea. Please par-

don me. "Certainly. Now that it's settled I'm not going to let any grass grow under my feet."

"Why, say! Gars.vel is to be the next president! Jove, you're lucky! Cortlandt told me last night that the old fellow's candidacy was to be announced Saturday night at the big ball. That's how he came to accept our invitation. He said his work would be over by then, and he'd be glad to join us after the dance. Well. well! Your future wife and father-inlaw are to be his guests that night, I

suppose you know. "Then they have patched up a truce with Alfarez? I'm glad to hear that." "It's all settled. I believe. This dance is a big special event. The American minister and the various diplomatic gangs will be there, besides the prominent Spanish people. 'It's precisely the moment to launch the Garavel boom, and Cortlandt intends to do it. After

it's over our little crowd will have sup-

done for us. Your promotion came just in time, didn't it? Talk about luck! We ought to hear from Washington before Saturday and know that our jobs are cinched. This uncertainty is flerce for me. You know, I have a wife and kid, and it means a lot. When you give Cortlandt that watch you'll have to present him with a lov-

"I-I'd rather you presented it." "Not much! I can run trains, but I can't engineer social functions. You'll have to be spokesman."

ing cup from the rest of us. I think

CHAPTER XX.

A Plot and a Sacrifice. HE night had been as hard for Edith Cortlandt as it had been for Kirk, but during its sleepless hours she had reached a determination. She was not naturally revengeful, but it was characteristic of her that she could not endure failure. Action, not words or tears, was the natural outlet of her feelings. There was just one possible way of winning Kirk back, and if instead it ruined him she would be only undoing what she had mistakenly done. As soon after breakfast as she knew definitely that her husband had gone out she telephoned to General Alfarez, making an appointment to call on him at 11. She knew the crafty old Spaniard would be awaiting her with

Her interview with him was short, however, and when she emerged from his house she ordered the coachman to drive directly to the Garavel bank. This time she stayed longer, closeted with the proprietor. What she told him threw him into something like a panic. It seemed that Anibal Alfarez was by no means so well reconciled to the death of his political hopes as had been supposed. On the contrary, in spite of all that had been done to prevent it, he had been working secretly and had perfected the preliminaries of a coup which he intended to spring at the eleventh hour. Through Ramon he had brought about an alliance with the outgoing Galleo, and intended to make the bitterest possible fight against Garavel. Such joining of forces meant serious trouble, and until the banker's position was materially strengthened it would be most unwise to announce his candidacy as had been planned. She did not go into minute details. There was no need, for the banker's fears took fire at the mere fact that Alfarez had revolted. He was dumfounded, appalled.

"Ramon is partly to blame. He is just as proud as you or as his father," said Mrs. Cortlandt. "When he heard of your daughter's engagement to our friend Anthony"-

"Ah, now I see it all!" His face darkened. "So, this is my reward for heeding your advice in regard to Gertrudis. She should have wed Ramon, as was intended, then I would have had a lever with which to lift his fa-

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ther from my path. Very well, then, there is no engagement with this Anthony. It may not be too late even

yet to capture Ramon." "The city is already talking about

Gertrudis and Kirk." "No word has been spoken, no promise given. There is not even an understanding. Do you suppose I would allow my great ambition to be thwarted by the whim of a girl, to be upset by a stranger's smile? Bah! At their age I loved a dozen. I could not survive without them." He snapped his fingers. "Come, we will see my friend Anibal at once."

[Continued next week.]

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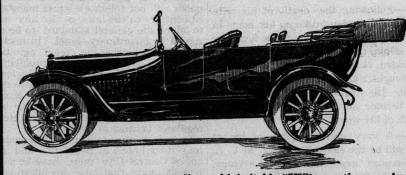
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