## CHEQUE NO. 9031.

## A FASCINATING ROMANCE OF A LONDON SUBURB.

By the Author of "By Crooked Paths," "Sheathed in Velvet," Etc.

There was none on it-neither date nor any other particular. It was quite clean! With a feeling of horror and despair I turned back the next tally, and found it

turned back the next tally, and found it was, as I expected, the one I had filled in the night before and given to Levens just before I went up to dress!

Then where had the missing cheque gone? The cheque book had not been out of my possession since Horace had given it to me that morning. The inference was plain—the cheque corresponding to this blank tally had been abstracted dur-ing the time Herace had had the book in

er-the recollection of the words he had spoken when he returned the book to me—"I thought I should have been here before you had had time to miss it." I understood now how much more there was in those words than appeared on the surface. If he had reached the office in time to restore the book to the place he took it from before I had discovered its absence, I should never have heard that he had taken it home.

I dared not look at Cynthia for fee she should see any sign of my horror in my face. So I kept my head bowed down over the book and forced myself to go on filling in the date in a methodical manner. Then I cleared my throat and steadled my voice carefully, and saked her for the amount.

"Forty pounds," she answered; and her voice was anything but steady—poor

Even as she spoke, and before I had time to fill in the amount, I heard Horace's key in the lock of the door below. I left the sum unwritten and caught her for a moment in my arms, holding her close to me-almost as if I had some occult premonition of what was to come. "Remember," I whispered, "you are

to leave us presently." The next moment her brother was in the room.

## CHAPTER IV.

Horace saw that there was something wrong the moment he entered. I noticed the blood rush to his face as his eye glanced from our faces to the che book lying open on the table, and I was afraid at first that he would make some admission of his guilt before Cynthia.

Above all things I wished to keep all knowledge of his backsliding from her, so I spoke at once. 'I've overstayed my time to-night, you

see. Cynthia has persuaded me to have some heavy tea with you instead of getting back to Clayhill to dinner.' "I'm afraid you'll find it a bad ex-

change," he said; "we don't keep the sort of table you are used to." "Oh, I shall do well enough!" I answered; and then, seeing Cynthia move towards the door, I opened it for her to

pass out, and turned round with my back against it to speak my next words. Horace had gone to the fire, and was stooping with his hands held towards the warmth; but he raised his head when I spoke, and stood with one hand holding nervously on the mantelpiece, looking down at the flames with his profile to-

wards me. "I have found out everything, Horace," I said. He made no answer, but his face

turned deathly pale. "It would be only a waste of time to tell you what I think of your behavior to Cynthia," I went on, "because you know, without any telling, how utterly contemptible it has been from beginning t. ad. How any one having the poorest spark of manhood in him could take such cruel advantage of a woman's forbearance is beyond my understanding.

"Did she tell you?" he asked sullenly, and not raising his head. It would have given me unqualified gratification to have stalked across the room and shaken him until the breath was nearly out of his body; but I remembered Cynthia, and kept my anger well under control.

"She tell me?" I cried witheringly. "You know she did not. Now the only question is, What am I to do with you? I suppose, with your usual delicacy, you have counted on my relations with your sister to save you from public exposure: but I'm not sure after all that a period of imprisonment would not be the very best thing that could befall you! At any rate it would remove you from the influence of your present circle of acquaint-

"Imprisonment?" he echoed, turning a scared, incredulous face to me. "You would never do such a thing-you would not dare! Besides, what have I done to deserve it?"

"Done to deserve it! Why, hanging would be too good for you if every one got his deserts, you good for nothing scamp!" I whispered vehemently, trem bling with the effort it cost me to keep quiet. "Don't mistake me, and think I am alluding to your paltry theft from me; it's your dastardly conduct to Cynthia that I should like to punish you for. But I can't touch you for that, so I'll take it out by punishing you for this other matter.'

"What other matter?" he asked resuming his sullen contemplation of the "I don't know what you mean."

"That's all rubbish!" I said, feeling ashamed of myself for bullying him. 'You know well enough I mean this!" I took up the book from the table and showed him the blank tally. "Now wait just two minutes, and let me speak before you perjure yourself. This cheque was torn out of my cheque book between the time I left my office last night and the time you returned the book to me this morning, after having it in your possession all night. Be quiet, will you, and let me finish! You must see for yourself how clearly suspicion points to you; and, if I put the matter in the hands of the police, you will find yourself in. the uncomfortable position of a man under police surveillance. But I'm going to make you an offer. Give me back the cheque—if you have not parted with it or tell me to whom you have given it, and I will prevent its being presented for payment, and so save you the disgrace of a bank prosecution."

"You're uncommonly kind, Mr. Quinton," he said, with a mixture of bravado and fear in his manner; "but I can't take advantage of your generous offer, for I neither have the cheque in my possession nor have I given it to any one; so I'm afraid I shall have to stand the disgrace of a bank prosecution, after all. But, if you do put the matter into the hands of the police, I think you'll live to

be sorry for it-that's all!" Of course this meant that my engagement with Cynthia would be endangered if I prosecuted him; and yet there was something in his manner that made me wonder for a moment if it were possible

for any one else to have got at the book.
With this idea came the memory of
Levens' remark that morning about the
queer company Horace went into, and
the chances of his pocket being picked.
I went to the wretched boy and put my
hand upon his shoulder.

"Horace, answer me one question truthfully," I said. "Where did you go while you had the book in your possession last night?"

He looked up at me still defiantly; but evidently he caught my idea, for he an-

"I didn't take the book out with me,

if that is what you mean. I left it at home on the sideboard, and there I found it when I came back at 11 o'clock." "And that is what you call 'taking it away for safety?"

"Cynthia was here all the evening," he began, and then stopped himself abruptly.

"I quite see the force of that remark,"
I said, "but since you had undertaken
the guardianship of the thing you ought
to have put it under lock and key. How were you to know who came in and out of the room while you were away?" "Cynthia knew it was there, and I felt sure she would look after it."

"Oh, Cynthia knew it was there?" "Yes; she saw me turn it out of my pocket, and asked me what it was, and I told her all about it. It was through her advice that I left it at home."

Again there was something in his manner that puzzled me, but only for a moment; then I instantly detected his meaning. Either he doubted Cynthia in the matter of the stolen cheque, or he wished to infuse a doubt of her in my

This idea roused such a storm of indignation in me that I hardly knew how to keep my hands away from his rascally throat. I really think it was a fortunate throat. I really think it was a fortunate thing that the table was between us; had he been within reach of my grip in the first moment of my passion I should cer-tainly have done him some bodily harm. As it was, I only glared at him speech lessly as he sank into the easy chair be

He seemed ignorant of my rage, however, and went on in the same sullenly injured tone he had used throughout,

"I think you ought to have considered the matter more fully before you made this accusation against me. You know as well as I do that the book lay on your office table, open to all comers, for a clear quarter of an hour while you were

"But every one had gone; there was not a soul in the outer offices as I passed through on my way up stairs."

"There was Richards. "There was Richards."
"Richards!" I exclaimed, indignantly.
"I would as soon suspect myself! He has been in the employ of the firm ever since he was a small lad and has never been a penny out."

"You're not so reluctant to suspect other people." "Because 'other people' are to my cer-

tain knowledge spending more money than they can obtain honestly."

He sprang up from his chair and faced me with scarlet cheeks, finding, like all weak natures, a strength in his rage that was denied him in his more sober mo-

"You shall not stand there insulting me any longer!" he cried, his voice trem ulous with anger. "If you don't choose to believe my denial, you must do the other thing and act accordingly; but I won't allow you or any other man to call me a thief to my face. If you say it again I'll do my best to pitch you neck and crop down the stairs. I don' suppose I should succeed, but I'd try my



"You shall not stand there insulting me

He stopped suddenly, and, turning to look in the direction of his glance, I found Cynthia standing, white and motionless, in the doorway behind me, with her eyes fixed in horrified inquiry upon her brother's enraged face.

"Cynthia, go away, my dear!" I cried. But she did not attempt to move until I took her cold hand in mine and gently forced her out of the room.

"A thief!" she muttered in a low tone, as I closed the door upon the angry boy. "Did he say you had called him a thief, Gerald?

"No, no." I answered, more annoyed at this consequence of the interview than at all the other details put together. "He was angry and did not know what he was saying. You mustn't give another thought to it-do you hear me, Cynthia?" for she was looking at me with a vacant expression in her eyes which convinced me she had not gathered the sense of my words. "He was angry, and, like all angry people, said a great deal more than he really meant. He won't forgive me to-night, though, so I'll get away at once. Come with me, Cynthia; we'll go west and have some dinner together. I've wired to the mother not to wait, so I shall get nothing at Claybill. Come and dine with me, and leave that angry boy to get cool again!

Cynthia shook her head, and took her cold hand away, gently but decidedly. "I could not leave him just now," she said; "he might think I too believed him

to be a thief if I went away and left him just now. I tried hard to persuade her to change her mind, but all my efforts were futileshe must stay and comfort Horace, she said; and I was obliged to give in at last, and go away in a very dissatisfied frame

of mind, to dine by myself. All through the night I thought deeply over the matter, and, just before I at last dropped off to sleep. I had decided on my line of action.

I was just a little surprised, when I reached the office the next morning, to see Horace at his desk, looking much as he usually did, except that he did not raise his head to join in the murmured

"Good morning" as I passed throug and I wondered whether it was sull guilt or indignant virtue that kept hi

As soon as I had got through the morning letters and given directions thereon, I wrote a line to the manager of the bank:
"Dear Crosley—Will you let me know directly my cheque No. 8,031 is presented for payment? Yours faithfully,
"GEMALD QUINTON."

I sent Richards of with this, bidding him hold his tensors cretitles and in less

him hold his tongue outside; and in less than a quarter of an hour the answer came back:

"Dear Quinton—9,031 was presented yesterday and cashed between 19 and 1. Your inquiry has led to the discovery that the signature is a forgery. We have put the matter in the hands of our usual agent, who will call on you during the

agent, who will call on you during the morning for any information you can give him on the subject. Yours faithfully, MAETIN CROSSLEY."

This was quicker work than I had anticipated. The person who had presented the cheque had certainly lost no time; and this hurry looked to me like guilty knowledge—as if the presenter had known of the doubtful nature of the cheque he was offering, and was anxious to get it off his hands before its worthlessness was discovered. Then the time. lessness was discovered. Then the time, too-between 12 and 1, when the first batch of clerks was out for dinner! The more I thought of it the blacker it looked ngainst Horace, and the more decidedly I made up my mind that I should have to lose the amount of the cheque and the price of a good round bribe to the detect-ive besides to hush the affair up with the

bank people.

While I was still thinking ruefully of the loss of this unknown sum-for no man relishes the notion of sitting down quietly while another puts his hands into his money box and helps himself—one of the clerks knocked at the door and an-

nounced that a lady wished to see me. Thinking it was a Sister of Charity or a begging expedition, or something of the kind, I was about to say I could not be seen just then, when I heard the rus-tle of skirts, and, turning round, I found

that it was Cynthia!

This was the first visit she had paid me since her father's death, and I sprang forward eagerly to greet her. Before I reached her side, however, some indescribable change in her manner checked

my impulsiveness.

As I held her hand tightly in both of mine, I saw with pain how her sweet hazel eyes seemed to have lost all their charming tenderness, and gazed upon me with a cold, stern, resolute expression which filled my soul with a presentiment of coming evil.
"Come and sit down, Cynthia," I said,

trying to draw her to my easy chair by the fire; "you must be cold. I am so glad to see you in Billiter street again!"
"I'd rather stand while I tell you what I have come to say," she answered, holding back, and speaking in a curiously constrained tone; "I shall say it a little

"There's something odd about you, and I fancy you've got some silly bee buzzing in your bonnet," I suggested, as lightly as I could, though my voice quavered and my heart was heavy. "Come-let us get it over! What wonder have you come to tell me?"
"Horace told me everything last

night!"
"Just what I expected!" I returned carelessly, though I watched her narrowly the while. "And I suppose you've rushed off down here to me with an absurdly exaggerated idea of this peccadillo of the boy's! My dear Cynthia, let me beg you not to get a morbid idea of this business into your head. Many a boy makes a little mistake of this kind in the beginning of his career, and finishes by ing a thoroughly trustworthy man of business. I assure you we think nothing of a first event of this nature!" Good heavens, how eagerly I piled up the lies as I saw her face hardening—slowly but

surely hardening—under my gaze! She put up her hand and looked at me with such sternness in her beautiful eyes

that further lying was impossible.
"I had a very long talk with Horace last night," she said, in measured tones, as though all feeling and emotion had ceased to stir her breast, "and he told me it meant five years' penal servitude, and moral and social ruin afterwards He said, too, that even if you let the matter drop the bank would insist upon

following it up."
"But the bank shall do nothing of the kind! I'll manage that—never fear!" I cried, trying again to draw her to me, for I vearned to comfort her and drive that terrible expression of despair out of

her face. "It's a splendid sign, his having confessed. We'll pull him through"-She pushed me from her with sudden

"What are you saying?" she asked. "I did not tell you he had confessed! I'll swear in a court of law that I never said

such a thing. How could I when it is

"Not true?" I echoed incredulously, "But I understood you that he had told you everything?" "Yes-everything you said to him-

your accusation, your threats and the results if he were tried and found guilty; the strong appearances against him too; all this he told me, but not that he had really done this thing. How could he say such a thing as that? He did not steal your cheque-it was I!"

I took a step backwards, and felt blindly for something to hold on to, for I was falling, falling, falling—always falling into an abyss of pitchy blackness; and as I went down, down, down, there was the roaring of a veritable Niagara in my ears. It seemed to me that I went on thus falling through space, with that hurricane of sound in my ears, for many years; and yet, when my sight and hearcame back to me, I was standing there in my office, holding the back of my easy chair, with Cynthia's white, stricken face close to mine, as she loosened the fastenings round my throat and

"My poor Gerald-you must learn to reconcile yourself to the truth. It was I!"

CHAPTER V. I seized Cynthia's hand and stopped her nervous attempts to set my throat free, with impatience at my own weakness.
"I'm all right!" I said; and then stopped to wonder if it was really I who

had spoken, or some one else, for I did not recognize my own voice. "You really must sit down," I urged, pushing her towards a chair, which she no longer refused, for she saw I was

shaking like a man with the palsy. We sat there in silence for fully a minute, and during that time I remembered Horace's manner on the previous evening, his reluctance when he said he had left the book at home, and that Cynthia had advised him to do so. While I thought thus, a feeling of intense pity flooded my heart as I realized what my poor, proud, honorable Cynthia must have endured before such a course became possible to her even to save her brother from exposure and shame. I found it impossible for a moment to look at her. I knew what she must be suffering, and I would not willingly add to her distress

by one glance in her direction. Then at last, after what seemed an eternity of silence, she spoke, and, if I had been startled at the change in my

own voice, I was shocked at the change

"I won't waste any more of your time," she said. "I have done what I came to do, and I'll go. One thing first, though—I should like you to know that if anything in this world could have increased my pain and humiliation in this matter it would have been the sight of your suffering under the discovery of my infamy. Good-by!"

She was moving towards the door, and I was rising with the intention of stopping her, when we were both checked by a knock at the room door and the entrance of the clerk again, this time with a card.

a card.
I recognized the name at once—it was
the detective from the bank! At all costs the detective from the bank! At all costs he must not see Cynthia! I was unnerved and almost incapable of clear argument, but I saw that much.

"In ten minutes," I said to the clerk, with a glance at the timepiece.

The moment the door was closed again

"You must not stop to ask questions nor make objections," I said, "but do as I tell yous There is no way out of this room except through the outer office, where this person is waiting, and I don't wish him to see you—never mind why. You must go into this large cupboard, which Mrs. Richards has had fixed up as a wardrobe for me, and remain there quietly until my interview with this man. quietly until my interview with this man is over. See—I'll move the coats, and then there will be room for a chair. Do you think you can keep quiet?"
She nodded in acquiescence. I saw a
new fear in her face, and fancied she

had guessed who my visitor was. With out another word I mixed a half tumbles of strong brandy and water, and told her authoritatively to drink it up; then I kissed her forehead and closed the door without latching it.

I tried hard to recover something of my every day manner before the detec-tive came in, but failed utterly. The moment Mr. Benson's keen glance fell upon me, I knew he saw the traces of my recent disturbance, so I made a vir-

tue of necessity at once, "Good morning," I said. "Sorry to have kept you waiting; gentlemen of your calling are always busy, I know, The fact is, I have received some news this morning which has upset me thoroughly, and I've been trying to pull myself together a bit before seeing you, but I'm afraid I have failed. I'm not in a fit state to discuss this business.

"I shan't trouble you much, Mr. Quinton," he answered quietly; "I only want a few scraps of information which you can give me. To begin with"—
"Sit down," I said, "and help your self to the brandy."

He thanked me and took the proffered chair, but he refused the drink. "I want to keep my head cool, you see, and pick up this trail while it is still fresh. To begin with, when did you first discover that this cheque, No. 9,031, was

He took the cheque from his pocket-book and smoothed it out on the table as

he spoke.

I looked at it eagerly, and saw that it was drawn in favor of Mr. Pettie-Jones for forty pounds. Forty pounds! The exact sum, neither more nor less, of Horace's present debts! Poor Cynthia! "I found it was missing last night."

"And have you any impression of your own as to when it was abstracted?" I was just going to prevaricate, when I suddenly remembered that Levens knew Horace had had the cheque book in his possession the whole of the night before last. If Benson did not get the information he wanted from me, his first proceeding would be to "pump" and ferret" cautiously among the clerks, and Levens would be only too glad to tell him all he knew. As a natural result, Benson would wonder why I had kept broke right away from the beaten track.

and opened out a new road on my own "Look here, Mr. Benson," I said, very quietly, getting closer to him, and hoping with all my heart that Cynthia would not hear what I said; "would you mind telling me what you are likely to get for a job of this kind from the bank

Mr. Benson half closed one eye and turned the other upon me with a swift glanco of preternatural acuteness.

"That would depend greatly on the amount of work, the time it took up, and so on," he observed, slowly. "Well, now, suppose you found out this person, what sum would you take to bring the news to me before you took it to any one else?"

He looked at me again, this time more

"I don't see that there could be any harm in that," he said, in a tone that was impressively cautious. "Harm! I should think not! How could there be any harm in your letting me know before any one else? Would

you take fifty pounds, and oblige me?" Benson looked at me for a few moments as though he would read my very soul, and I met his glance unflinchingly "I believe you mean square," he said, at the end of his scrutiny; "and, if you'll pass me your word as a gentleman that

why, I'll oblige you." I held out my hand to him. "I give you my word that this is a purely personal matter, only interesting to myself," I said, with quiet emphasis;

this is no trick to catch me tripping,

and I saw he believed me. After I had given him a few facts in connection with the matter in handcarefully withholding all those likely to be of any value in the event of his refusing the offer I was going to make presently-I brought the conversation back again to what was really my main purpose, by asking what was the biggest price he had ever received for carrying a ob of this kind through to a successful

"This class of job doesn't pay so well as some others," he told me. "We don't look to make much out of a forgery business. Our best chances come in when we've got family hatreds to work on. Now two years ago I had what threatened to be a divorce court job on. I lived in a house in the country for three months for the purpose of watching the mistress of it. The husband's mother hated her like mad, and I really believe would have given one of her fingers if we could have pulled the business off. Well, she came to me when I had been in the house a week-the mother, you know-a powerful old swell she was, but as cruel as a cat-and offered to pay me five hundred pounds if the case against her daughter-in-law was proved through me. That was the biggest chance I've ever had;" and Mr. Benson sighed re-

signedly. You did not 'pull the business off,'

then? "Bless you, no, sir! The woman was as innocent of any real harm as a babe unborn. A flighty, skittish piece of goods, but as honest a woman as you could wish to meet. The appearances against her turned out all moonshine, as knew they would. Her husband got ashamed of having listened to his moth er's nasty insinuations, and begged his wife's pardon most humbly in my presence; and they're as happy a couple now as you'll find anywhere. But it was a big chance, you know-five hundred

Here was my opportunity, and I seized

n, gropping my voice to the faintest whisper.

"You shall have the chance again,

Benson; but this time you can earn it more easily—by simply holding your

tongue."
"Five hundred pounds!" he exclaime in a clear, penetrating whisper, which was torture to me, knowing how keen those poor listening ears would be. "Five hundred pounds only for holding my tongue! About this, of course, you mean?"—with his gloved finger on the

reque. "You must undertake not to try to find out even yourself," I murmured, nodding in assent; "and you must play with the bank people until it is too late to put any one else on the job."

"Is that all?" he asked. "There are no

other conditions whatever attached earning this money? You won't ask me to do half a dozen other tricks and include them in the same bill by and by?"
"I will ask you to do nothing but what

"Then I'm your man!" he said resolutely; and this time it was he who offered his hand and I who grasped it, with a relief and gratitude in my heart far beyond the power of words to express.

After this I got rid of him as quickly as I could, dreading the effect of this enforced silence on poor Cynthia in her present nervous state. I bustled through

the arrangements for paying the money at the same time being careful to avoid arousing his suspicion, and hurried him off under the pretense of having another He turned, on his way out, as though a sudden thought had occurred to him and pledged me to secreey as a brothe Mason. I answered his sign at once and I fancy we both separated all the more satisfied with each other for the

"Don't interrupt me for a quarter of

discovery that we were fellow crafts-

an hour, Levens," I called out, as I shut the door and went back to Cynthia. I found her so prostrated that she was unable to rise from the chair; but she looked at me with such pathetic earnest-ness and she tried so hard to speak that I felt sure she had heard the greater part of my interview with the detective It was most grievous, but there had been no help for it.

My heart ached for her, as I more than half carried her to the easy chair again, and took off her bonnet and cloak as quickly as my foolish, clumsy fingers would let me, stripped off her gloves and undid the dress buttons at her throat.

"Don't try to speak a word," I said sharply, when her lips began to move again; "sit still and rest. Don't worry now! You'll be better presently. I bathed her temples with the brands and water and chafed her poor cold hands vigorously; then as I knelt before her a sudden overwhelming feeling of compassion seized me, and I bent for-

ward and kissed her white lips impetu ously.
"Oh, Cynthia, my dear," I cried heart brokenly, "why did I give in to you? Why was I fool enough to let you come to this lonely life in London? I should have forced you to stay in comfort at Clayhili instead of subjecting you to this. How can I ever forgive myself? How?"



"Oh, Cynthia, my dear," I cried heart brokenly. "Kind old Gerald," she said presently. putting up her finger and touching my cheek gently; "good, kind old Gerald!"

I smiled at her, though I felt more like "What are your two charming little women doing without you this morn-ing. I asked, anxious to ease the painful strain on her nerves by a change of sub-

"You forget it is holiday time. We do not begin lessons again until Monday."
"You will never begin lessons again. Cynthia," I answered quietly, but very decisively. "I gave in to your whim last September, and you see what has come of it. This time I mean to have my own way, and nothing you can say or do will induce me to make the least alteration in my plans. I am going to marry you this day week and carry you off to Italy for a long honeymoon of three months. We'll dispense for once with wedding breakfast, trousseau and all the rest of the usual absurdities, and do just as we like, without any reference to the opin-

ions of our acquaintances."
"You mustn't do it, Gerald," she cried trying to withdraw herself from my embrace-"you must not even think of such a thing! Have you considered what it would mean for yourself? This shameful crime of mine cannot be kept secret -it will leak out some day, try as we will to keep it quiet; and how would you feel when you found people spoke of your wife behind your back as a thief and a forger? You don't seem to have realized the enormity of my crime! don't appear to understand that what I have told you this morning places me outside the pale of respectable society! You don't seem to see"-

I stopped her peremptorily. "I see a woman who has been triedah, so sorely tried, my Cynthia!—beyond her strength. I see a woman whose warm affection has for once overcome her power of judging between right and wrong-whose great love has, in onsolitary instance, warped her moral indement: but I see no criminal, nor a sin ner who has sinned beyond forgiveness. I see the woman I love just as I have always loved her, as I always must love her, until heaven sees fit to divide us by death! Cynthia, we will be married thir day week, and we will go away for a time and be very, very happy—so happy, my love, that we will forget all about this wave of sorrow that has swept over

She did not attempt to argue the matter any farther-indeed, if I looked at all as I felt, she must have seen how useless all argument would have been in my then state of mind, for I was firmly re solved that Horace should no longer have it in his power to cause, or even threaten to cause, unhappiness between

"I shall tell the mother and Jem to night," I said, when I had put her into the cab and given the man the address. They will come to see you to-morrow, I expect; and you must arrange with them about a dress for next Wednesday. She did not answer, but looked at me with a world of meaning in her sad eye. as the cab drove away.

CHAPTER VI.

The next day or two I was busy enough making arrangements for my long ab-

I telegraphed to our head man at Mont-real to come home at once to look after things when I was away. Then I had to contrive to pay that five hundred pounds to Benson, the detective, in such a manner as to avoid arousing suspi-cion, besides settling up and giving my decision on a thousand and one other matters on which the master's word is needed. My time was so fully occupied that I was only able to get up to Kent-ish Town once between Cynthia's visit on the Wednesday and the day I had arranged for the marriage, and even then I was only able to spend an all too brief

hour with her.
On the Saturday morning Horace knocked at my door a little before the time for leaving, and asked to be allowed

to speak to me privately.

This was the first time we had met face to face since our stormy encounter on Tuesday evening. I had written a full withdrawal of and apology for my accusation, thinking to spare us both the awkwardness of a personal interview on the matter—for I was obstinate enough to think him still the sinner and Cynthia the sinned against in the whole matter, and I would not risk a discussion, fearing I might be led into an expression of my opinion. Consequently, when Hor-ace asked to see me on the Saturday morning, I was unpleasantly surprised, and gave a rather grudging assent to his

"I shall not keep you five minutes, Mr. Quinton," he said, still with that same sullen defiance in his manner which had been so noticeable at our last interview "what I have to say can be said in a very few words. I wish to leave your em-ployment, and the sooner you can ar-range it the better pleased I shall be all, I should prefer not to come to the office again.

I looked at him with what I could not help feeling was a ludicrous stare of perplexity. Here was a new and unexpected

complication.
"Sit down, Horace, and let me know what this is about. What is your reason for wishing to leave the firm?" "Why," he answered, in a faltering

voice, first speaking a few words very hurriedly, but without expression, as if he had learned them by heart, and then stammering over the next few as though he were ashamed of what he was saying -"why, the fact is, I can't stand the hints and sneers of the men in the office any longer. I can see that they all be-lieve me guilty about that cheque busi-ness; and of course it is impossible that I should be openly exonerated by a pub-lic declaration of the real—of the truth, so that I think it best for all concerned that I should leave. Only I do hope, Mr. Quinton, that in your recommen to my next employer you will make him understand that I am innocent of this crime of which they suspect me."

I felt the hot blood rush to my face as

he spoke; it was strange how my dislike

for this boy clung to me through every-thing.
"It is not likely that I should knowingly let the innocent suffer for the guilty, Horace. Although you seem to hint it, you cannot really believe it. I am disposed to think you are mistaken in your leading fact. I don't think the men in the office know anything at all about the matter you spoke of, and I cortainly don't see why they should associate you with it in any way, even if they did know. Try to shake off the morbid fancy and make yourself con-

"There is no morbid fancy in it," he answered, doggedly. "There has been a detective asking some curious questions of young Phillips—the man who works at the same desk with me—and yesterdry old Lebens heard of it and said he thought he knew what the detective was driving at, for he had heard from one of the bank clerks that there was somethin wrong with one of Mr. Quinton's private cheques. 'I suppose that was the detective who called here on Wednesday morning,' he said-'the morning your sister was here, Debenham.' There was nothing in the words, I know," added Horace; "but from the way they were spoken and the queer look he gave me, I saw he had some suspicion in his mind. The others looked at me too, and there was an awkward silenco when Levens had finished speaking, and I could see that they scented something wrong somewhere and that I was mixed up in it somehow; so I think I'd better go-I should be more comfortable elsewhere

As he finished speaking a sudden idea occurred to mo. "You had a great wish to go abroad after your father's death, Horace; have you that wish still?' He looked at me inquiringly. "Because, if you have," I went on, "I think I can help you. How would you like to go out to our Melbourne house for a year or two?"

The cloud on his face lifted as if by

"Do you really mean it, Gerald?" he cried, forgetting in his delight the stiff 'Mr. Quinton" which had so amused me "It would be the best turn you could possibly do me.

"When could you be ready to sail?" "Ready? Now! On Monday-any time you like to name!" "Nay, nay; stay and see Cynthia and me made one first," I said, smiling at his quickly fired enthusiasm. "The So-rata sails on Wednesday, and you could

overtake her at Plymouth on Thursday night. Is that soon enough for you?" For answer he stood up and took my hand, and there were signs of tears in "You and I have never been very goo friends," he said, with a sense of shame in his manner at last, "You have al-ways thought I behaved badly to Cyn-

thia, and I have always resented your

interference between me and my own

sister. I have behaved like a beast all the way through, and I beg your pardon, and am very grateful to you. "There's nothing to be grateful to me for, but I am glad you can see you have been rough on poor Cynthia. Now for business. I'm going to give you a cheque for twenty-five pounds-you're sure to want some extra things. After the wedding I'll give you another ten for your wine bill going out, and this you must manage on. I've had one or two heavy expenses lately"—his face flushed quickly, and I saw that foolish Cynthia had told him something—"so that I can-

not afford to be munificent." "It's more than I deserve," he murmured. "Then if you really think so, try to

deserve it better by letting Cynthia hear of your doing well out yonder. It's not my way to lecture, you know, Horace, and I don't want to impose conditions or bind you down in any way, because don't believe it ever does a bit of good; but, if you care for your sister the least bit in the world, show it by steering clear of the horse racing fraternity, my boy And now I must be off. I wish I could come out to Kentish Town with you, but it is impossible; I have an appointment at 4 o'clock. Don't trouble to come to the office again unless you wish to. You'll have plenty to do between now and Thursday morning, and I'll set things right with Levens. By the by, I don't think I shall see either Cynthia or you again before the fatal day-so, remember, 10:30 sharp at the church!"

He wrung my hand and left the room; but he opened the door again the instant be had closed it to say:

"I'll never put a shilling on a house again as long as I live—I swear it?" When I got back to Clayhill that night I told my mother and Jem what I had done with regard to Horace, and they

"It will relieve poor Cynthia for time, ct any rate," said Jem, "although the wretched cub is sure to turn up sooner or later to wear her life out of

her."
I had told them that Cynthia's past worry had been due to Horace's gambling debts, and Jem's indignation had known no bounds; but on the subject of the cheque I had been as silent as the grave. "Have you seen Cynthia today, Ger-ald?" said Jem.
"No," I answered; "I have been too

"We went up this morning and tried hard to persuade her to come down and spend to-morrow with us, but she would not hear of it. It would be her last Sunday with Horace, she said, and she must have him quite to herself. She is so strangely quiet and solf possessed, she seems to me to be in quite a dreamy state. She started in a most extraordinary manner once or twice today when I pesmanner once or twice today when I pes-tered her for an answer to my questions. The mother says her nerves are shaken by being so hurried over her marriage; but it seems unnatural to me for a woman to be so scared at the prospect of marriage with a man she cares for. I don't think it would affect me like that!" Although I should have found it diffi-cult to put my thou, he on the subject

cult to put my thou, hts on the subject into words, it is nevertheless a fact that Jem's remarks produced a certain new anxiety in my mind about Cynthia. I did not like to think of her as being so calm and still, so intent upon her own thoughts as to need an emphatic reminder to recall her to what was going on round her. Considering how thoroughly satisfied I was with my scheme for her cure, it was a little surprising that, when Wednes-day at last arrived, it found me tortured

with a certain unaccountable conviction that something had gone wrong. I slept late in the morning, for I had lain awake well on into the small hours, thinking of many things, and the moment I began to recover consciousness, before I was sufficiently awake to think before I was sufficiently awake to think clearly, I was in terror of some impending misfortune. When I was at last fully aroused from sleep, my first clearly formed thought was the recollection that this was my wedding day. Savage with myself for allowing my waking moments to be clouded by an impression of ill omen, I sprang out of bed and bustled through my dressing arrangements with more expedition than usual, trying to "make believe" that I had quite forgotten the uncomfortable feeling, and that I was as jolly "as a sand boy." But all the time that conviction of coming evil was present in my mind; not all my efwas present in my mind; not all my ef-forts could drive it out, until at last it made me feel quite faint at heart. The mother and Jem started before

The mother and Jem started before me. They were going to Cynthia's first, to accompany her to the church; I, of course, was going straight to the sceng of the ceremony. After they had left I dawdled in and out of the sitting rooms in a restless, aimless manner. My modest couple of portmanteaus had been forwarded to Folkestone on the previous day, so that I had nothing to occupy these last moments of my bachelorhood.

I strolled into the morning room by and by, and stood for some minutes

and by, and stood for some minutes looking at the envelopes containing the wedding cards, lying in a big heap on the center table, and addressed in dear old Jem's masculine hand, all ready to old Jem's masculine hand, all ready to post on her return from the ceremony. I was at the church in good time— twenty minutes past 10. I looked at my watch as I got out of my hansom at the corner of the street, and strolled slowly up to the porch, thinking I should have

some time to wait.

As I turned in at the gate, noticing with some surprise that the church door were not yet opened, a young man who looked like a stable helper came forward

and touched his hat, "Mr. Quinton, sir?" he inquir "Yes," I replied, wondering what the man could want with me. "A note for you, sir." A good deal surprised, I was just going to slip it into my pocket, when I saw the

writing was Jem's. I opened it, and found it was addressed from Cynthia's.

"Mr. Quinton, sir! A note for you, sir."
"Come here at once"—it ran. "Don'
be frightened; but something has hap
pened to defer the wedding."

I do not think I was really surprise I had been expecting something of this sort all the morning. I turned and halles the first passing hansom and went off a once.

Jem came running down stairs and hurried me up to Cynthia's pretty sitting

room, where my mother was quietly sit ting, with a pained, anxious look on he gentle face. "My poor, dear old boy, she has gone," cried Jem the moment I was

safely inside-"gone and left you!" "Gone? Where?" "To Australia with Horace. Read I seized the letter she held out ans

read: "Jem dear, forgive me! I know it will be a hard thing to do, for you would far sooner forgive an injury to yourself than one to Gerald; still I ask you not only to forgive me yourself, but never to rest until you have made him forgive me too. Perhaps you will find this easier when I tell you that I should do him a far greater wrong by marrying him, as things are

what I mean, ask him; if he wishes you to know he will tell you. Your most unhappy friend, CYNTHIA DEBENHAM." "How do you know she has gone with Horace?" I asked, looking despondently round the room where I had been so happy with her, and noting the absence many things of value-a portrait of her mother by a celebrated painter, her "Broadwood" and other things-sold

at present, than by running away from him as I am doing. If you want to know

doubtless to raise her fare. "Because the man down stairs helped Horace with the luggage last night, and saw the labels." I sat down, hid my face in my hands

and groaned aloud-for her more than for myself. What would her life be in a strange country, utterly dependent for companionship and comfort on one un-reliable lad, without even the sympathy and support of the few friends she had had in London? The thought was unen-durable! She might repulse me if she chose, but I would make one more effort