

The Power Behind the Throne

I.

Wallace Blake sat facing Mr. Veermont, his employer and guardian, in his private office. The merchant wore that beaming smile of complacency that belongs to prosperous middle age. The occasion was a difficult one for the young man. He had a hard subject to open up, but he had never lacked courage in dealing with men, especially with his father's old friend, and he made a start.

"Mr. Veermont," he said, "I want your advice."

"Relating to business?"

"Indirectly, yes! In its main particulars, no! The fact is, it's a private case where I think your methods would apply. You tell me you take a great interest in my welfare, which I believe. Will you advise me?"

"With pleasure, my boy. State your case. I've dictated all my letters and finished my balance, and the week's work is about done. So I'm at your service."

And the merchant looked even more genially pompous than he had before, and smiled a yet kinder smile on his favorite employe.

"Well, the fact is I am in love."

"How romantic!"

"And I want to know how to proceed."

"Write her a little poetry, my boy; that generally fetches them. If you can't manage it yourself steal someone else's. I found Moore and Byron very useful, and I've paid as much as five and sixpence for an original sonnet by a shoemaker with the gift of song. Then I should—"

"Oh, that part is all right. I've got as far as that. In fact, the lady in question has accepted me."

"Well done. And she's got a bargain, Wallace. What's the difficulty now?"

"Her people."

"Obdurate?"

"I hardly know. I haven't broached the question yet. That's where I want your advice."

"I see. Girl willing. Puzzled about the parents. H'm! What sort of father has she?"

"Well, I hardly like to say. He's very nice and gentlemanly, but he has strong opinions, and knows his own mind."

"In other words, an obstinate, pig-headed old mule. I begin to see how the land lies. You feel a little diffident in approaching him?"

"Exactly."

"Awkward case, Wallace, but don't be downhearted. I had just such a difficulty myself. But why do you come to me?"

"Well, your advice is always so good. How did you manage?"

"My old method. What I call the Napoleonic method. I go at the power behind the throne. Mr. Pax, my father-in-law, was a capable, strong-willed man, but I thought there was a power behind him. There was—his wife. I made friends with Mrs. Pax and all went well."

"I see. I'm afraid it would hardly apply in this case. I believe this gentleman's wife is inclined to lean on his judgment entirely."

"H'm! And he's as obstinate as a mule, you say?"

"No, I didn't; that was your suggestion."

"But you admit it. No, don't argue; I want to help you, my boy, as I feel a keen interest in you. Now, this mulish, stupid man must be dealt with. By the way, who is the girl? Do I know her?"

"After what you've said I hardly like to—"

"Nonsense. Out with it."

"Well, her name is Dora Veermont."

"My daughter?"

"Yes."

"And I'm the obstinate old mule?"

"I never said so. In fact I—"

"Quite so. The words were my own. Funny."

Mr. Veermont had one great virtue. Nothing ever annoyed him. More than that, he could enjoy a joke at his own expense as much as at anyone else's. The little incident amused rather than vexed him, but it never for a moment affected his judgement. He thought for a moment, then he continued—

"And you want my opinion, Wallace?"

"Yes."

"Well, you shall have it. The affair won't come off."

"Why not?"

"You're beginning at the wrong end, my boy. Now, I always was a just man, and I believe in a case like this being properly thrashed out. I owe it to you to hear you state your case; I owe it to you to give you a reasonable answer. Supposing we commence. Now, sir."

And he leaned back in his comfortable office-chair and smiled benignantly on the young man.

"I love your daughter," Wallace began.

"Admitted."

"She loves me."

"Admitted for the sake of argument, but unproven."

"We are suited for each other."

"H'm! I doubt it! But skip the sentiment. How about means?"

"I have one hundred pounds a year for life, private money, and come into three thousand pounds when I

am twenty-six years of age. Four months now."

"As your father's executor, I admit it."

"My salary as chief traveller is two hundred and fifty pounds a year, with prospects."

"What prospects?"

"Of a substantial rise when I marry Dora."

"Yes—when you do. Anything beyond?"

"That's dependent on yourself. There ought to be."

"Partnership, I suppose?"

"Possibly. But, Mr. Veermont, aren't we going ahead a little too fast? I've stated my case."

"Well, I'll state mine. One hundred pounds a year isn't much to keep up my daughter on."

"Three thousand pounds invested in house property will make it nearly two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Not sufficient."

"My salary and prospects."

"Might stop at the end of a month."

"I could better them."

"Eh?"

"I could better them."

"How?"

"Ratcliffe, Limited, want me to turn over to them. My connection is a big one and very friendly with me personally."

"Sounds like a threat, Wallace."

"Certainly not. I'm just showing I could provide for Dora."

"But you are an employe, remember. I have other plans for my only girl."

"Three thousand pounds would buy an interest in a business."

"So it would. So it would. But the affair is not coming off, my boy."

"You object to a business man as your daughter's husband?"

"No—not absolutely. I would prefer his not being in business. Dora will have plenty of money, and business is very uncertain and risky. But I don't object to a business man. All I say is that that business man must have what I call the Napoleonic spirit, and I don't think you have it."

"But you admit I am a good traveller?"

"Yes."

"And my work is business-like and satisfactory?"

"Yes."

"My returns increase?"

"They do."

"I am cautious and rarely make mistakes?"

"Quite right."

"Well, where do I lack?"

"I'll tell you, my boy. You haven't the spirit of the conqueror in you. You could take over my journeys and increase them, but you could never have started them. You would improve this business as a partner, but you could never have brought it out of nothing, like I did."

"You don't know that I couldn't."

"I don't know that you could. Let me explain myself. The last time you came to me for advice was about Porley's account; you couldn't open it. Porley's wouldn't buy, you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, I opened that account for you. There is no harm in telling you how, though I don't want the story repeated. You found Porley's manager dense, stupid, and unconvincible, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"So did I. You went on for three years trying to talk him round. When you told me I made one call, saw there was no talking him round, that the man wasn't built that way, so I never wasted another moment on him. I went straight for old Porley himself. Got friendly with him, persuaded him his manager was ruining his business, got him to give him the sack and to appoint another, a young man of my own suggestion, who, of course, buys from me out of gratitude. That's what I call the Napoleonic spirit!"

"I don't like it. It was rough on the manager."

"I got him a good position elsewhere. But that's not the point. In business the great thing I look for is this, that a man must show the spirit of the conqueror. After that, you know—All's fair in love and war."

"Business is war, then?"

"Distinctly!"

"My little incident is love. I'll think over your words, Mr. Veermont."

"Do. But put your money on the right horse, Wallace. Take the straight tip. It won't come off."

II.

Three months later Mr. William Veermont sat at dinner with his family. The party consisted of four: Mr. and Mrs. Veermont, Dora and Mrs. Veermont's mother, Mrs. Pax.

"William," said that lady, cheerfully, "I have a pleasant surprise for you."

The man of the "Napoleonic spirit" looked up. Just a trace of hope flitted across his face as she spoke.

"What is it, mother?"

"I've consented to stay another week."

His face fell.

"It's very kind of you," he said. "I hope you're not putting yourself out on our account."

"Not at all, William. I'm staying on my own."

"But I don't like to feel that we are claiming—"

"Thoughtful as ever, William, but don't say another word. My mind is quite made up. I'm only too pleased to stay and give a little help in household matters. I'd make it a month but for one thing."

"And that is?"

"That I'm going to take Dora for a fortnight to Ilfracombe. The sweet child is delighted at the thought."

"As your father's executor, I admit it."

"That is kind of you but hadn't you better start while we have such glorious weather? If you delay it a week the weather may change."

"William, I don't like my plans interfered with. I have an object in view. I have discovered a most gentlemanly young man who is taking his holidays at Ilfracombe on Monday week, and he is going to act as our escort, courier, and general factotum."

"Young man! Who is he?"

"Mr. Wallace Blake; he is in your business."

"Wallace Blake! You don't say—"

"But I do. I have taken a great fancy to him, and he has consented to give up his holiday to escort Dora, under my chaperonage, of course."

"But he won't be able to take his holiday Monday week."

"He told me he would."

"I've had to alter my plans. It will be later."

"Then I'll stay till he's ready. I don't suppose Dora will mind waiting."

"He mayn't be able to go for a month."

"Then my visit will last another month."

Mr. Veermont gasped.

"Mother, he said, 'I have a particular reason for not wishing Dora to meet that young man. The friendship is not suitable—'"

"William, pay attention to me. I ask you who are you to oppose your views to mine? Have I not made a special study of character? I know what companions are suited to Dora. You don't. So that ends it."

"But, mother, this Wallace Blake—"

"Yes; this Wallace Blake is one of Nature's gentlemen. Since Dora introduced me to him three months ago I have become simply charmed with him. No trouble is too great, no service too difficult for him. He has dropped in many an evening to learn my views on political subjects. He entirely agrees with me on the question of woman's suffrage, and has joined our auxiliary committee. He organized our annual meeting and secured two members of Parliament as speakers by his own personal efforts. No, William; Mr. Blake is a most worthy young man, and I will not have his name and reputation attacked."

"But, mother, you don't know him as I do. He is in my business, and I can judge—"

"Better than I can, eh?"

"I wasn't going to say that; but—"

"William, let me tell you once and for all that I know a man when I see him. My judgment is good. Take your own case, for instance—"

"I—"

"Don't interrupt. When you came after Annie her father wouldn't hear of it. He summed you up pretty quickly, but I saw some good points."

"Yes, yes, quite so; but—"

"He said you were vain, empty-headed, and conceited, and told me that he didn't fancy a son-in-law with no more brains than a turnip and no more position than a counter-jumper. What did I say?"

"I don't know. Perhaps another time would be better to discuss—"

"What did I say, William? I'll tell you. I said, 'The young man isn't much to look at, and his brain is rather slow, and he has rather a commonplace look in a crowd. But he's steady, and he doesn't drink and swear, and the very conceit you object to will pull him through. Besides, Annie has taken a fancy to him, and she mightn't get another.'"

"What did I say, William? I'll am a judge of character, and I've been a good friend of yours."

"But—"

"William, I am not going to discuss the affair any further. Please understand that my plans will be carried out."

III.

A few days later Mr. Veermont was interviewing Wallace in his private office.

"You are going for your holidays next week?"

"That was my arrangement."

"To Ilfracombe?"

"Yes."

"H'm! Pretty place."

"I've heard so, but I've never been there."

"Anyone you know likely to be there?"

"Your daughter and Mrs. Pax."

"Hence your choice of the place?"

"Yes."

"May I ask how long you have known Mrs. Pax?"

"I was introduced to her soon after our conversation on the Napoleonic spirit and the power behind the throne."

"As a result of the conversation?"

"Yes; particularly the reference to Porley's account."

"H'm! I see. You still adhere to the idea that you love Dora?"

"I do."

"You are sure she reciprocates?"

"Certain."

"Don't you think it would be better if you were formally engaged before you started for your holidays?"

"I am sure it would be."

"Well, come round to-night and we'll fix it up."

"This is kind of you, Mr. Veermont."

"Oh, don't thank me. It's the case of the power behind the throne." But Wallace!

"Yes."

"You don't know what that power is yet, my boy. But you shall. Mrs. Pax is deeply attached to you, I find

and she dotes on Dora. I've been talking to her, and I've persuaded her that her duty is clear."

"And that is—?"

"When you two are married she is going to give up housekeeping and live with you altogether. Isn't that kind of me? A mother-in-law in the house for a fortnight is an event to remember, but a grandmother-in-law as a perpetual guest—why, it will be Paradise."—London Tit-Bits.

THE "EVIL EYE."

Strange Story Told at a Trial for Murder in France.

The superstitious belief in witchcraft and sorcery is still far more prevalent in rural France than would be generally thought. A bricklayer named Merot, living in the village of Saint George-sur-Moulons, was so firmly convinced that a neighbor had the "evil eye" and had cast a spell over him that one day in April last, goaded into a state of terror, he could bear it no longer, and beat the presumed sorcerer to death. Merot was put on trial for murder.

The accused told the court that what exasperated him most was the nerve shattering influence the deceased possessed. The dead man was constantly predicting misfortunes that invariably befel him as foretold. Several times the prisoner declared the parish priest had tried to exorcise the evil spirit from his neighbor, but without avail. One day, when Merot met his victim, the latter said, "Hullo, not dead yet? You have only one more week to live." Flesh and blood, declared the accused, could stand these predictions no longer and he there and then, it is said, despatched his neighbor.

To show his belief in the reputed sorcerer's power was not due to mere imagination, Merot related a number of instances which he declared afforded proof of the dead man's uncanny gifts. Thus one night, while in bed, Merot said, he was about to expectorate on the floor, when the voice of the evil genius, who could not see, was heard from without to say: "Spit on the right of the bed."

"How then," asked the accused, "could he have known I was about to spit?" On several occasions, asserted the prisoner, the sorcerer had given him stomach aches, and twice he had brought on partial paralysis. He afterwards came and revelled in his (Merot's) sufferings. Several villagers of Saint George-sur-Moulons were called as witnesses, and, in response to the judge's question as to their opinion of the deceased, declared that while they had not "absolute" belief in the dead man's power of evil, they were none too sure that he had not the evil eye.

The jury were so greatly impressed by the evident sincerity of both the prisoner and his peasant witnesses, that they eventually brought in a verdict of acquittal.

CZAR WILL GO TO FRONT.

His Interest in the Work of the Russian Red Cross.

Everything that is new in surgery has been sought for by the Russian medical staff, writes A. G. Hales. Nothing that would be likely to ease the agony of shattered limbs has been overlooked. All that science can do in this direction will be done, for I have been informed by men who know that the Czar has given this department a great deal of his own personal attention.

"Look after my poor wounded fellows," is said to be his cry repeatedly, and the soldiers know it and they love him for it. I have seen their faces light up at the mention of his name. I have heard them cheer when an order of his has been read to them, and it is useless for his enemies to say that the heart of the army is not with him, for it is.

By and by, when all fear of a great European conflagration has settled down, as all thoughtful men must hope it will so settle, the Czar will go to the front, and see for himself how his orders have been carried out.

That he will go to the front when laments, what petty miseries and grand despairs, what nobility and meanness might be surging by, unknown! Yet all wore the same absorbed, preoccupied, unobtrusive look, each was apparently as unconscious of the others and as indifferent to them as is some blind natural force. The aspect of such a crowd is impressive, and one's own insignificance and unregardness in the face of it is chilling. Its fierce onrush seems motiveless, or moved only by the blind brutal struggle for life.

And here, Philip thought with a bleeding heart, friendless, defenceless the fear of a European eruption ceases. I am positive, for I have it from a source absolutely reliable: and when he goes the whole army will give him a welcome so great, so cordial, so inspiring that Russia's traders will marvel. They do not worship him as a god, as the Japanese warriors worship the Mikado; but they reverence him as a man whose every waking thought is how to alleviate the sorrows and sufferings of the men who are fighting for his flag and theirs.

Pretty Daughter—"So you don't like Tom?" Her Father—"No. He appears to be capable of nothing." Pretty Daughter—"But what objection have you to George?" Her Father—"Oh, he's worse than Tom. He strikes me as being capable of anything."

THE KING'S DIPLOMACY

WAVE OF ANGLOMANIA HAS SWEEPED OVER FRANCE.

The Paris Swells Play Cricket and Turn Their Trousers Up.

The most extraordinary development of this season in France has been the wave of Anglomania which has spread over the country. Not only is it noticeable in Paris and at all the fashionable resorts at the seaside and in the mountains, but in England itself, where for the first time in the history the watering places have been flooded with French men and women.

Never before have most of these people been in England. The English tourist has for a century been a feature of French life, but Frenchmen are not travellers, and if they do go abroad it is not to England, at least until this year.

FASHIONS AL'ANGLAIS.

While English women continue to go to Paris for their gowns, the well-to-do Frenchman now goes to London for his clothes, or has them made by one of the many English tailors who have opened branch shops in Paris or at Trouville. The latter place had a most English look this summer. The men wore their trousers turned up at the heels and smoked pipes as they paraded the broad walk from the Casino to the Hotel des Roches Noires and back again, or as they lounged upon the sands in their white ducks or tweeds.

And the newspapers have been almost hysterical in the way they have wept on the neck of John Bull. The automobile boat races across the channel last week were hailed by them as another love-knot in the ribbon that binds the two peoples.

Cricket has been played at Dinard for years, but Dinard has always been almost an English town and the game has hitherto been confined to Britons. But Frenchmen have taken it up this season and at Trouville, Fecamp, Houllgate, St. Malo and the other bathing places it has been funny to watch the young swells trying to bat the heavy leather ball and to look at home in shin guards and drink "shandygaff."

THE MODE TO TALK ENGLISH.

Five o'clock tea (pronounced in Paris "fe-o-clo-tay"), has become such an institution of French life that even in the country towns at almost any patisserie. However, Britons who are fond of tea prefer to drink the excellent French beer than to run the risk of the wonderful decoction that is served under the name of their home beverage.

It is now the fashionable thing to be able to talk English, which the average educated Frenchman has never thought worth the trouble of learning. And in the cafe concerts songs from the London music halls are applauded nightly.

This wave of Anglomania is due almost entirely to King Edward. As Prince of Wales he spent much time there and has hosts of friends among the old aristocrats, but his latest visit and the wave of friendly feeling that was aroused by it are responsible for this new thing, and Paris, ever seeking a new sensation, turned itself to Anglomania as something it had never thought of before; and really it seems to like it.

WIRELESS TELEPHONY.

Experiments Being Made by a Spanish Engineer.

A new system of wireless telephony is being experimented with by G. J. de Guillen Garcia, a Spanish engineer, and his son. It was the son who noticed that in the telephone of the Tommasi coherer located at the receiving stations, there was a sound difference, according to the air gap in the interrupter, of the Rhumkorff apparatus. This suggested the idea that a similar apparatus would be susceptible of transmitting the human voice to a distance without the agency of the wire. The arrangement used in the subsequent experiments is simple. At the transmitting stations is a Rhumkorff coil giving a spark 1 3-16 inches in length, as well as the necessary oscillation, a small antenna, and a grounded conductor. Between the induction coil and a small battery of Grenet cells is a special interrupter, acting as transmitter and interrupter. The automatic interrupter of the inducing coil is stopped and the condenser is used for enhancing the oscillator spark. At the receiving station is a Tommasi coherer connected to the receiving antenna and the grounded conductors. In a telephone receiver the noise produced by the Hertzian waves on traversing the coherer is plainly heard. On applying the mouth to the microphone and singing or speaking every sound vibration was attended by an interruption in the passage of the electric current through the primary circuit of the induction coil, the number of sparks at the oscillator thus being varied. The underlying principle shows, therefore, some analogy with the mechanism of an ordinary telephone. The weak point appears to be the difficulty of getting a microphone of sufficient vigor. While with Garcia's condenser the present apparatus transmits singing tones with satisfaction, it leaves much to be desired in its transmission of ordinary speech.

The sweetness of love's young dream often depends upon the amount of taffy there is in it.