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LOVE'S COMMAND

BY JOHN A. STEWART.

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CHAPTER I.

A KINSMAN AND AN ENEMY.

After five and forty years, they tell me, turbulent students of the University of Edinburgh listen with envy to stories of the battles of Peter Clephane and Andrew Kilgour. To one whose sun is far on the wrong side of the meridian, and who ought rather to be engaged with his evening prayer than his morning folly, the memory of early misdeeds can be no matter for satisfaction, yet, I must own, it causes me no surprise to hear that our ungracious reputation still lives, for if fervency of hate could give immortality to strife ours might be forever memorable.

Jonathan and David made a covenant of love, their souls being knit together in the bonds of a mutual affection, but we swore vows of vengeance, our hearts being aflame with reciprocal ill-will. As a consequence, hostilities were frequent and hot, and by a process as quick as it was natural we got into the very blackest books of the authorities. Almost as regularly as day succeeded day we heard it angrily prophesied that our rebellious and intractable spirit would assuredly bring us to a speedy and an evil end, I being the greater sinner (from causes which may presently be appreciated), was encouraged with the direr predictions.

But the censors might have saved their breath. If these warnings had any effect at all, it was to stimulate and embitter our enmity. There are certain moods in which admonition but fans into the flame the spark of rebellion that lies in every unregenerate human bosom. I fear that mood was ours. Defiant and impenitent, we were a grievous affliction to our professors, and the cause of many fits of choler, resulting in red faces and shaken nerves. I regret to add that what rendered us no better than a pest for our teachers made us a source of endless delight to our fellow-students, particularly to such as were studying divinity.

I hope students of a later generation are vouchsafed more grace, though I am bound to aid that several of those who used to cheer loudest in the thick of the fray are now worthily thumping pulpits, and with evident success pointing their hearers to the straight gate and narrow way. Who knows but they serve heaven all the better for having some special knowledge of the ways of sin? If the devil were converted, he would probably make a first-rate preacher.

Peter and I were kinsmen, and the deadlier enemies on that account. We had come up in the same month of the same year to pursue our studies, his college maximes are ironically dry. He is from Dundee. I from a remote part of the Highlands, and as we had never previously met nor even heard of each other, save by vague and casual reports, our introduction was that of strangers. For cousins the meeting was not cordial. A town bred exquisite and the sole heir of a lawyer with a big bank account and a trunkful of mortgages, Peter entertained a sovereign contempt for all such as were not of the gilded court of Mammon. The wretch who could not fee a fashionable tailor and live like a prince, if he happened to be of princely tastes, would inspire neither affection nor respect in my worthy cousin. Himself possessed of the longest purse and the finest clothes in the university, he was fawned upon by a body of the most devoted toadies that ever worshipped a golden calf.

To the charmed inner circle of his worshippers I was never for a moment admitted, yet none of his chosen friends touched him so closely as I did nor yielded him so much pleasure. They flattered, but I served as target for his wit, an unenviable capacity that was extremely gratifying to him and extremely galling to me. Never an opportunity of vexing me did he miss. Not once during the two years we were together did he forego the slightest chance of taunting and ridiculing me. Though naturally average to toll, he would cheerfully have laboured for half a day to coin a sentence that would sting or contrive an insult that would humiliate me.

At our first meeting, though I spoke a purer English than his own, he begged for an interpreter, as unhappily he had not the delightful Celtic dialect at his command, expressed surprise that one born to the heritage of a kilt should demean his fine legs with trousers, and then with a sarcasm that was alternately like ice and fire in the blood he commented on the instructive and interesting antiquarian cut of breeches made in the Highlands.

"As for your coat," said he, "it is the finest specimen of the antique I have seen, and I more than half suspect you of being the lucky finder of a garment dropped from the ark during its cruise among the northern peat bogs. As an antediluvian relic there would be a fortune in the thing. Why don't you exhibit yourself?" Whereupon his satellites laughed, uproariously, calling out that it wasn't fair to purloin the clothes of Noah and say never a word about it.

I left him with a crimson face and my heart already a furnace of hate. Thenceforward we were as powder and flame to each other—we had but to come into contact to go off. Psychical experimenters hold that an idea is a force of which the natural tendency is to translate itself into action. When we were together, the tendency of our ideas was generally violently that way.

In the tongue I was no match for Peter, nor indeed in the entire university was there his equal in the use of that diabolical weapon of offense. In three minutes he could have blackened the character of a saint beyond hope of recognition and put a much more patient man than Job beside himself with passion. As for me, a single sentence, sometimes a single sneering little laugh or curl of the lip was enough to bring my blood to the boiling point and create an irresistible itching in my fingers to close on his throat. To do him justice, he took no pains to evade a contest.

When we laid aside our coats to settle differences, I generally managed to pay off scores satisfactorily, for, though he was my master with the tongue, and three years my senior to boot, being bred a hunter and climber of hills, had the firmer muscle. Perhaps, too, I had the greater ardour in crucial moments, and if that had its effect, it was not the first instance in which the spark of naphtha fire in the Celtic blood told in the fight.

But the fortunes of war are variable. It chanced that one day my enemy caught me with a crippled arm. He railed upon me, I retaliated, we fought, and the victory was with him. If he had whipped the whole British nation, instead of a maimed and insignificant unit of it, he could not have exulted more, nor if he had been of the race of rebel angels could he have paid his debt of vengeance with a keener or opener malignancy of delight.

"There, you Highland blusterer," he cried, when the issue was decided. "Have you enough, or would you like more? How does it feel to get a drubbing?"

"You ought to know who have had it so often," I retorted. "But as to this day's work, we will reckon for it yet. To-morrow we'll see who crows loudest."

"We will," he laughed, with a more sinister expression than I had ever seen in his face before. "You and I agree for once. And when the reckoning comes there are muir cocks I know whose crow will not be so cruse as it is to-day."

He came up to me with a devilish gleam in his eyes and snapped his fingers in my face. "To-morrow!" he hissed. "I'll show you what'll be to-morrow. See, I'll crush you like that!" and he stamped and ground his heel in the dust. "A poor, crawling thing like you setting yourself up before me!" Then he stood off a step and broke into a laugh of derision, but, checking himself, he bent forward again, saying, in a tone of simulated compassion:—"After all, as I'm a Christian, I ought to pity you. There is a shilling for you. Take it. Before seven days are over I dare say you will find it useful."

Such was my amazement at this speech and the sudden change of his manner, that I mechanically held out my hand and took the shilling. But its touch, which was as a sting in the quick, restored my senses, and I flung the coin back in his face.

"You may insult but you cannot degrade me," I cried, a hot, moist, priickly sensation springing to my eyes. "What your meaning is I cannot tell, I only know that, being yours, it must be spiteful and malicious. But before the seven days of which you talk are ended you will be snubbed, and you will repay your affront with interest." And in the meantime I will say in the spirit of Timon, it is a pity you are not good enough to spit on."

My outburst awed the throng that had gathered about us, and I strode away in the midst of a dead silence, the picture, as an eyewitness afterward told me, of fury incarnate. Peter's tongue, however, was not long still.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, mockingly, ere I had gone fifty yards; "so the beggar would ride on horseback, would he? Pride goes before a fall. The pauper who refuses alms to-day may to-morrow dispute with the dogs for a bone. Even a Highlander may find it hard to feed on his pride."

I turned quickly on my heel, under a frantic impulse to go back and rend my tormentor on the spot. Perhaps it was the vision of jeering faces that deterred me, for the crowd were chiefly his friends, or it may have been an acute sense of my physical disability, but I only called out in a frenzy of passion: "They laugh best who laugh last. I'll silence your tinkler tongue yet," and held on my way, my rage so furious that passers-by stared at me, my brain throbbing with the fellest purposes of revenge.

Poor fool! One brief moment's prescience, one glimpse of the future, and the keen-edged sword that fate held imminent over my head would very speedily have checked my passion and turned my mind to other things than petty aims of vengeance. Yet such foreknowledge would not have diminished my sense of wrong. My enemy's evil influence was predominant, and, little as I guessed, it was to shape my whole subsequent career.

On reaching my rooms I found a letter from home awaiting me. The superscription was my father's, a circumstance that at another time and in a calmer mood would immediately have struck me as peculiar, since my mother was the invariable correspondent at Kilburnie. But just then I had not eyes to observe. One thing and one thing alone I saw and thought of—the detested object of my wrath. He loomed upon my distracted mind like a portentous fate, shutting out all else. Instead of making haste to learn the news, I crushed the letter in my hand and strode about the apartment, darkening it with violent language.

At length I tore the envelope and read the letter. The effect was as if a fevered man were to plunge into an icy flood and have all his flaming currents chilled in an instant. I seemed to have passed in a moment from one dreadful state of existence into another still more dreadful. I had leaped, in the words of our poet, from "hell heat to arctic cold," from the region of anger into that of despair, and for awhile I was paralyzed. At first I read incredulously, thinking that fury must have disordered my brain. Holding my head in my hand, I read again, and yet again, hoping to prove the first interpretation wrong. But perusal only brought out the fatal truth the more clearly. Then I thought that my father must have been mad when he wrote, but that hypothesis also had to be abandoned. The letter indeed was mercilessly sane and explicit.

It was a voluminous document, covering a full half-dozen sheets of large, closely-written paper. That I might the better understand the crisis which had come upon us and the course of events leading up to it, my father related the history of all the preceding generations of our house. My ancestors, according to the partial historian, were men of rare virtues and splendid accomplishments, brave, generous, and well-favoured, aiming ever at keeping their honour bright and their hall full of good cheer for their friends. Their hospitality shone conspicuous in ages more princely than ours, and, said my father with a pride that had its touch of pathos, "No man of them was ever known to do what did not become a Kilgour or Kilburnie." But he was constrained to add, "Though I am afraid they were not always as wise as Solomon."

The eulogy was the preface to a very bitter tale. Bog and crag and moorland but ill fit people with a chivalrous spirit and a lavish hand. The Kilgours having exhausted the treasury in keeping open house began to borrow. Then bit by bit the estate passed away, till only a remnant remained. "When I came into possession of it," wrote my father, with a stroke of sardonic humour, "it was like succeeding to an almshouse." Then he went on to tell of the incessant attacks of harpies—Israelitish usurers, called by conscienceless lawyers—and how these harpies were prey closing in like ravenous beasts of prey, howling for blood. Wherefore it comes, continued the letter, "that things are pressing hard on us at this present writing, and I and your mother are sore distressed." There was, however, a chance of keeping the foe "beyond the gates" by temporizing until such time as I, the sole hope of the family, should be able to come to the rescue. The manner in which I was to bring relief was by beating the harpies at their own game. In other words, I was to retrieve our fallen fortunes by turning lawyer forthwith.

"After much meditation," pursued my father, "the law commends itself to me as a high and honorable profession. A lawyer in our family would fairly set us on our feet again. Lawyers are all rogues, Andrew, as I know to my cost, but you might get along enough spoon to sup with the best of them. Once started, once rising, none knows where you might stop. You might be my Lord Advocate yet, and go to court and make a great name and get influence, and then we could pack our bonnets and whistle with the highest of them."

This was bad enough and hopeless enough, but the pinch was yet to come. "As my progress might be facilitated, I was to begin my legal career in the office of Thomas Clephane, in Dundee—that is to say, I was to put myself completely and unconditionally in my enemy's power. My father thanked heaven that I had an opportunity of making so good a start. "I will write to your uncle immediately," he said, "and it lies secure in my mind that he will admit you on favourable terms. Delay not, my son. Let our straits be a spur to your resolution. We look to you to save us, and I am sure we do not look in vain. I have a firm memory of hearing you once say that your cousin, who will naturally be your uncle's partner and successor, is your fellow student at the university. Cultivate his good-will, and by the grace of God he may befriend you."

I read this letter a dozen times, dazed by its news, sickened at heart by its misplaced and tragic hopefulness. Locking the door to prevent intrusion, I sat down and tried to think. What was this burden that had been so suddenly laid upon me? What was I asked to do? Not half an hour before Peter had publicly ground his heel in the dust to signify how he would crush me, and I had answered in angry defiance. Now I was to plead for his favour, his help, his good-will. I was to court his scorn, to invite him to heap insults and humiliations on my head. He might taunt me and tempt me, call his companions to join him in making sport of me, he might spit on me, treat me like a dog, and I could give nothing in return but the crouching subserviency which a dog owes to its master.

I sprang to my feet and began to pace the room in a tumult of revolt and indignation. No, by Heaven, it should never be! Never as long as he drew breath would Peter Clephane call me slave. To be snubbed, contemned, jeered at, treated as a creature of the mire, every time the humour seized him, was a prospect to be cancelled at once. He must be aware of our condition. Already he had flung at me the taunt that I was a pauper and given me a foretaste of the treatment I might expect at his hands. My father could have no knowledge of what his proposal meant. He would not so willingly deliver me bound into the hands of my worst enemy.

And then, with a subduing and sobering effect, it struck home to my heart that all this was but the rebellion of a selfish pride. The individual has his rights, private feelings have their place and value, but to weigh them against the claims of duty is impious. Could I be guilty of such impiety? Could I turn a heedless ear to the call for help that had reached me? No, a thousand times, no! Better suffer any humiliation; better sacrifice freedom and liking forever than turn traitor to those I loved. Help? Yes, I would help. If necessary I would go to Dundee and be deaf and dumb under Peter's persecution. He could lay on, and I would never so much as protest.

The gloaming came, and my landlady entered with a light. The cheerful glow of lamp and fire strengthened my resolution. My writing materials were on the table, and I sat down eagerly to reply that I would do in all particulars according to my father's wishes. As I wrote my paltry objections grew less and less till they were no more than a vague shadow at the back of my mind! My spirits rose, the prospect brightened. I was almost glad of the opportunity that had arisen to do something practical. I would throw myself into my new studies with all my soul and—who knew? I might yet realize my father's dream, and be a legal luminary and restore the fortunes of my family. I had read of such things; I would make my life a romance.

My sheet was half full when all at once there arose a great shouting under my window. I stopped to hearken, but unable to distinguish what was said I raised the sash and thrust out my head. The moon, which was near the full, shone in an unclouded sky, so that the light was good. Below I saw half a dozen familiar figures, and in their midst, with a leer on his face, was Peter Clephane. He broke into a tirade of reviling and mockery as soon as he saw me, asking me how I liked my drubbing, and whether I wouldn't come down and get more. I closed the window, firmly resolved to make no response. Words are but wind, and they would not turn me from my purpose. But the clamour waxing louder and more aggressive, so that I could not write with any degree of self-possession, I put out my head again to beg them to go peacefully away. I was received with a volley of very ill-smelling slime and a shout of derisive laughter.

"That's a slight expression of our respect and esteem for a scabby Highland man," cried Peter. "How does it taste?"

I shook off the filth with a dizzy head and a sharp constriction of the throat that made me gasp. I did not speak—I could not, but there was a fascination that held my eyes fast on my enemy. As I did not withdraw, I was bespattered a second time. They shouted in their glee louder than ever, Peter's voice being high over all. The rising tumult within drowned the noise without [illegible] was said. Lights began to leap in a fantastic maze before my sight, and there was a sound in my ears like the vicious song of a million bullets. I cleaned myself again as well as possible, my assailants screaming in an ecstasy of joy at my plight, then turning backward I clapped on my bonnet and descended the stairs.

My appearance outside was the signal for another and a fiercer storm of ridicule. But my passion was already running high, and needed no fresh temper of derision to make it surge. Walking straight up to Peter and looking him in the two eyes so that he flinched and fell back, I said in a voice that was strange even to myself:—"The time has come for you and me to settle some points. Come this way and bring your friends."

At the back of the house there was an unused plot of ground covered by a soft sward. It offered a desirable seclusion, and thither I led them. They took the thing as a fresh jest, making boisterously merry over it, little aware of the maddening electricity that tingled along my veins or the deadly intent that had brought me there.

Immediately upon entering the enclosure I threw off my coat and waistcoat, slipped the braces from my shoulders to have freer play, and tightened the belt about my waist. Peter stood regarding me with a look partly of curiosity, partly of contempt.

"I think you had better strip," I said, quietly. "I want no advantage." There was no longer any thought of the crippled arm.

"Your words are brave to come from so white a face," he laughed. "You look as if you had just seen your grandfather's ghost."

"Get ready," I said, biting my lip in my impatience, so that I tasted the salt blood.

"Well!" he cried. "I declare I have never seen a better performance at a circus, though I must say it seems an odd taste to want two thrashings in one day."

"Get ready," I repeated, "for fear I kill you before you have a chance of defending yourself."

He stripped leisurely, taking time to fold each article daintily as he took it off, and to keep my purpose hot his tongue was busy with sarcastic compliments to my valour. At length he bowed elaborately, saying he was ready to receive any attention I cared to bestow upon him. The words had scarcely left his lips when he was reeling from the attack. But it was not a fight such as we used to have. It was a furious onset and a feeble defence. I can liken it to nothing but

The words had scarcely left his lips when he was reeling from the attack.

a cur struggling impotently in the claws of an infuriated tiger. He was stupefied and windless before the smile of disdain had time to leave his face. I was not conscious of his resistance. I did not feel his blows. I thought we had not well begun when he was an inert heap on the ground, and his friends were calling for mercy. I turned from him to them, for my fury was still in raging flood.

"Will any one of you or all of you together take his place?" I asked.

But the challenge was not accepted, for no man cared to fight a demon, and so crying out upon cutiffs and cowards who could jeer, but had no heart for battle, I re-dressed and went back to my rooms.

With the passage indoors there came a swift and miraculous change. I had not been absent ten minutes, yet I returned to another world, a world of convulsion and frightful upheaval. My father's letter lay on the table, and beside it the unfinished reply. Glancing at them, my eye caught the words of supplication, the appeal for aid. I sank into a chair and buried my face in my hands.

"And this is how I help," I cried, with a choking sob. "This is my loyalty to them I love. God forgive me!" And my anger went out in a passion of tears, and only remorse and a sense of folly remained.

Having shattered my prospects and disregarded my father's advice as far as it was possible, I felt there was nothing to be done but to go to him as quickly as might be and seek his pardon. It was not an agreeable nor indeed a promising mission, for though my father was one of the most fortunate of men, he was hasty tempered and at times narrow and arbitrary. I was thwarting him in his dearest wish, and he would not easily forgive me, but go to him I must, were it only to hear his sentence of banishment. So I set about packing at once, resolved to start by the first coach on the morrow.

CHAPTER II.

A PERSONAGE OF VAST IMPORTANCE.

I slept ill that night. The demons that attend the pillow of the wretched were hard at their work of torture, and on the morrow I rose with a mingled feeling of soreness and bewilderment. My bodily injuries indeed not caused little inconvenience, but such was the dire confusion of my mind that I could not at once recall the precise causes of the turmoil—the thunderbolt of disinherit, the provocation, the folly, the impending ruin. The effort, when successful, did not tend to raise the spirits.

A clear perception of the situation was simply a passing from the vague horrors of a nightmare to the certainty of an obdurate fortune. But necessity has always a stimulant, and to certain stubborn natures calamity is its tonic. I was braced for what was in front, if not with Christian fortitude to bear my wrongs and hardships, at least with a desperate defiance, a determination, deep as the wounds in my soul, to retaliate with all my might upon my enemies. There might be no hope of victory, but there was a wicked satisfaction in provoking the conflict and rendering evil for evil even to the bitter end! In the raw atmosphere of the dawn, however, my resolution could not keep me from quivering.

My impatience to be off brought me to the point at which I was to take the coach a good hour too early. That time, for the want of better employment, I spent pacing to and fro on the pavement of Princes street, chewing the cud of very sour reflections. About me stablemen shouted and swore, horses clattered into place, and fussy passengers made a commotion for no reason whatever, as fussy passengers have a way of doing. At another time I should have been amused, but then babel and the tongues ten times confounded could not have diverted my dismal and rankling thoughts.

The morning broke brilliant and keen—caller, as they say in Scotland—with the wind coming briskly off the firth and the level sun striking with a dazzling radiance on dewy roof and tower and spire. At that hour the scene was one of transcendent beauty. Misery itself, which is egotistical and jaundiced, could not look without a thrill of exaltation on the romantic city flashing in liquid brightness, as if she had just arisen, dripping from a bath in the sea, and glowing, nay, blazing, with a thousand colours that made her pinnacles points of fire and turned her ramparts and buttresses to opal and amethyst.

Every moment there were fresh enchantments, magical effects of gold and rose and gauzy silver, so that Edinburgh, clustering about her hills and precipices, and broken into iridescent nooks and fantastic pictured masses, seemed a Scot's dream, a city of fairyland. Yet already, in obedience to the condition of her existence, she stood as a fresh jest, making boisterously merry over it, little aware of the prosaic yoke of a sordid routine. Her citizens were coming forth to their daily toil with the marks of struggle on their brows. A little while longer and the sun would look down on men and women striving with each other for a pittance to keep life in. By an easy process I made their case my own.

The castle alone seemed independent and unsubduable. Lifted completely above the trivial and vexatious affairs of life. The sentinel's steel gleamed on the battlements with stirring and quickening suggestions of its own. I thought of the glory of carrying arms, experiencing in imagination something of the shock of battle and the rapture of victory. Why should I not join the ranks of those who gayly sought renown with banner and music? What more natural to the hand of a Highlander than the hilt of a sword? But as I asked myself the question the trumpet blared out its summons to mount, and so instead of getting into warlike accoutrements and putting my fortune to the arbitrament of bloody strokes, as my Lord Stanley has it, I took my seat on the coach as meek as any Quaker.

We rolled off with regal pomp, our flourish of trumpets and the festive style of our equipage collecting a group of gazers at even the early hour of 8. But they did not long feast their eyes on our splendour, for our steeds being fresh, and the charioteer fond of displaying we were soon out of the echoing streets and bowling merrily along the highway. The exhilaration was immediate and exquisite. There is something in freedom and rapid motion and vivid sunshine and the jovial companionship of irreverent coachmen and trumpeters and the admiration of blushing rustic maidens and mettlesome horses, gay with polished trappings and flying ribbons, that even the unfortunate and hypochondriac cannot resist. My spirits, chill and leaden as they were at starting, were soon in a glow, which they retained more or less until we drew up amid shouts of welcome at the Hound and Stag in Perth, where we were to pass the night.

The Hound and Stag was a cozy old inn, with low black ceilings, yellow sanded floors, a cheerful display of kegs, copper kettles, crystals and other utensils of good cheer, and an appetizing fragrance diffused by savory pans and bubbling, hissing ovens. It was a place which the hungry guest entered with expectations and left with regret and pleasant recollections. The traveller can find no such hospitable refuges now. We have palace hotels and great gilded dining-rooms and formality and grandeur and invisible landlords and supercilious waiters who criticise your manners and give exorbitant tips for doing it, but no comfort like that of the Hound and Stag. That evening the entertainment was so princely that long ere the supper was over half my fellow travellers were uproariously hilarious, and the host took no offence.

Being in no mood for revelry, I stole out through the town and down by the green, leafy banks of the Tay. When I returned, some of the company had prudently gone to bed, others, less mindful of appearances, were snoring serenely in their chairs in every variety of posture that the incontinent human frame can assume, and one or two, whom I took to be kirk elders on furlough, were discussing the doctrine of predestination and eternal punishment in a perfectly amiable and fatuous manner over well-plenished tumblers of toddy.

But the chief thing to be noted is that during my absence another guest had arrived. That he was a man of consequence was evident, no less from his own lofty and imperious mien than from the servile attentions of mine host. He was booted and spurred, as though he had just alighted from the saddle. A silver-mounted riding-whip and a pair of riding gloves lay beside him on a table, and he wore the loose brown velvet coat affected by the better class of horsemen. High about his neck was a huge stiff collar that held his head defiantly in the air and kept his ears rigorously at attention. An imposing bunch of seals dangled from his fob, and his rosy gills and portly waist proclaimed that when he was at home he knew how to dine. His head was bald on the crown, and a ragged wart marred the symmetry of his nose, which, however, was flung in the air with a semptiternal snort of contempt. His air told he was perfectly well aware that when he stood his two legs supported the very pink of creation.

When I entered, he did me the honour of staring hard at me, but almost immediately he brought the tips of his fingers supercilliously together and turned his eyes to the ceiling in a manner which said plainly he regretted demeaning himself with an utterly insignificant and casual stranger, and that he would certainly not do it again. As he was delivering himself silently but impressively of these sentiments and resolutions the landlord bustled into the room with a bowl of steaming, fragrant toddy, a glass and a ladle, all of which he set down with becoming ceremony on a small table specially placed at the right hand of the great man. The great man thereupon took his eyes from the ceiling and his eloquent finger-tips apart and condescended to give a grunt of approval. Thus encouraged the landlord became adventurous.

"I have taken the liberty, sir," he said, in his suavest manner, with an inclination of the body toward his patron, "to put the heel of a lemon in it. I aye think lemon adds to the flavour of the best Glenlivat. Let me fill your glass, sir. There. I think you'll find that worth drinking. I had Sir Thomas Gordon, of The Elms, here the other day. Something in India or China, I dinna weel ken which or what—a fine fellow if he was na just so yellow, but that's the liver, sir. My word, a bad liver's—"

"An ugly companion," said the great man, taking a sip; "but, to say the truth, I'm not interested in Sir Thomas' biliary organs."

"Faith, nae mair am I, sir," promptly responded the host. "A man has troubles enough of his own in this world without fashin' wi' other folks' livers. But, as I was saying, Sir Thomas happened to be in—"

"Unspeakably gracious on his part, to be sure," interrupted the great man. "Yet the fact does not interest me."

"Weel, weel, sir," responded the host, with a deepening of the colour in his rubicund face, "I'm sure I'll be the last to fash ye wi' things ye dinna want to hear. I only meant to say that Sir Thomas praised the toddy of the Hound and Stag."

"Doubtless very gratifying," said the great man, taking another sip. "You'd better have the bellman sent out to apprise the town of Sir Thomas' compliment. Meantime, if you come back in fifteen minutes, I'll have a question to ask you."

"My tongue's aye at your service, sir," replied the host, unable to conceal his chagrin. "A man like me must wag it at the will of them that pay me." And picking up his tray he marched out of the room with an injured air. The great man gazed at the retreating figure until the door closed upon it; then he nodded his head with profound significance. "All tarred with the same stick," he said to himself; "all born blatherers." With which sentiment he crossed his legs and lay back to contemplate the contents of his glass.

Punctual to the minute, the host returned, and with an extremely solemn countenance, bowed toward the great man. The great man, moving his head slightly so as to have a fairer view, stared without speaking.

"You told me to be back in fifteen minutes," said the host.

"It was rather a suggestion than a command," returned the great man. "But since you are here, will you have the goodness to inform me what hour the Highland coach starts in the morning?"

"Six o'clock sharp, sir."

"Six o'clock," repeated the great man, musingly. "Then intending passengers must be afo