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By E. F. BENSON

AUTHOR OF DODO, THE RUBICON



NEW YORK  
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## MAMMON AND CO.

*BOOK I*

## CHAPTER I

## THE CITY DINNER

"EGOTISM is certainly the first," said Lady Conybeare with admirable firmness; "and your inclination towards your neighbour is the second."

Now, this was the sort of thing which Alice Haslemere liked; and she stopped abruptly in the middle of her rather languishing conversation with nobody in particular to ask for explanations. It sounded promising.

"The first what, and the second what, Kit?" she inquired.

"The first and the second lessons," said Lady Conybeare promptly. "The first and the second social virtues, if you are particular. I am going to set up a school for the propagation of social virtues, where I shall teach the upper classes to be charming. There shall be a special class for royalty."

Lady Haslemere was not generally known as being particularly particular, but she took her stand on Kit's conditional, and defended it.

"There is nothing like particularity—nothing," she said earnestly, with a sort of missionary zeal to disagree with somebody; "though some people try to get on without it."

Being a great friend of Kit's, she knew that it was sufficient for her to state a generality of any kind to get it contradicted. She was not wrong in this instance. Kit sighed with the air of a woman who meant to do her unpleasant duty like a sister and a Christian.

"Dear Alice," she said, "there is nothing so thoroughly irritating as particularity. I am not sure what you mean by it, but I suppose you allude either to people who are prudes or to people who are always letting fly precise information at one. They always want it back too. Don't you know how the people who insist on telling one the exact time are just those who ask one for the exact time. I never know the exact time, and I never want to be told it. And I hate a prudish woman," she concluded with emphasis, "as much as I abhor a well-informed man."

"Put it the other way round," said Lady Haslemere, "and I agree with you. I loathe a prudish man, and I detest a well-informed woman."

"There aren't any of either," said Lady Conybeare.

She sat up very straight in her chair as she made this surprising assertion, and arranged the lace round her throat. Her attitude gave one the impression somehow of a rakish frigate clearing for action, and on the moment came the first shot.

"I am a prude," said a low, bass voice at her elbow.

Kit scarcely glanced round.

"I know you are," she said, replying with a heavy broadside; "but then you are not a man."

"That depends on what you mean by a man," said the voice again.

The speaker was so hidden by the arms of the low chair in which he sat, that a knee, shin and foot, in a horizontal line on the invisible support of another knee, was all that could be seen of him.

"I mean a human being who likes killing things," said Kit without hesitation.

"I killed a wasp yesterday," said the voice; "at least, I think it died afterwards. Certainly I disabled it. Oh, I am sure I killed it."

"Yes, and you remembered it to-day," said Lady Conybeare briskly. "You did not really kill it; it lives in your memory, and—and poisons your life. In time it will kill you. Do you suppose Jack remembers the grouse he killed yesterday?"

"Oh, but Jack is like the oldest inhabitant," said Lady Haslemere. "He never remembers anything, just as the oldest inhabitant never remembers a flood or a thunderstorm or a famine at all like the one in question. That means they don't remember anything at all, for one famine is just like another; so are thunderstorms."

Kit paused a moment, with her head on one side, regarding the speaker.

"No; forgetfulness is not characteristic of Jack," she said, "any more than memory is. He remembers what he wants to remember, and forgets what he wants to forget. Now, it's just the opposite with me. I forget what I want to remember—horrid stories about my friends, for instance—and I remember the sort of thing I want to forget—like—like Sunday morning. Isn't it so, Jack?"

A slightly amused laugh came from a man seated in the window, who was no other than the Jack in question, and, incidentally, Kit's husband.

"It is true I make a point of forgetting unpleasant