TOURMALIN'S TIME CHEQUES; PP.1-191

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Tourmalin's Time Cheques; pp.1-191 by F. Anstey

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CONTENTS.

PROLOGUE.

PAGE

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On Deck—Curry and Culture—Alternative Distractions—A Period of Probation—The Oath and the Talisman—Wavering—A Chronological Error—The Time Bargain—Tourmalin Opens an Account

CHAPTER I.

TOURMALIN'S FIRST CHEQUE AND HOW HE TOOK IT.

Fidelity Rewarded—Love's Catechism—Brain-fag: a Timely Recollection—The Experiment, and some Startling Results—Question Time—"Dear Friends"—A Compromise

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND CHEQUE.

313226

Contents.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD CHEQUE.

Good Resolutions—Casuistry—A Farewell Visit— Small Profit and a Quick Return 63

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOURTH CHEQUE,

A Blue Moon-Felicity in a Flat-Practical .	Astr	on-	
omy-Temptation and a Relapse-The 1	Diffle	ul-	
ties of being Completely Candid-A Slig	ht N	lis-	
understanding-The Avenging Orange		14	78

CHAPTER V.

PERIODIC DRAWINGS,

A Series of Cheques—Their Advantages and Drawbacks—An Unknown Factor—Uncompleted Confidences—Ibsen, with Intervals—A Disappointment—A "Search Question" from Sophia —Confidences Restored

CHAPTER VI.

FOIL AND COUNTERFOIL,

4

Contents.

24

CHAPTER VII.

THE CULMINATING CHEQUE,

Sophia Gives an Explanation, and Requests One-Her Verdict-Peter Overraled , . . . 130

1

t

٤.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAID IN HIS OWN COIN.

CHAPTER IX.

COMPOUND INTEREST.

Back to the Fire Again—A Magnanimous Return— Catching at Straws—Two Total Strangers— Purely a Question of Precedence—"Hemmed in" and "Surrounded"—The Last Chance . 163

CHAPTER X.

Dénouement .		30	()	×	36	×	. 185	
THE EPILOGUE	i e		4	4		•	, 190	

5

PAGE

а. н 19 20

1.11

ę

1

(1 28 27

TOURMALIN'S TIME CHEQUES.

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THE PROLOGUE.

On Deck.—Curry and Culture.—Alternative Distractions. —A Period of Probation.—The Oath and the Talisman.—Wavering.—A Chronological Error.—The Time Bargain.—Tourmalin Opens an Account.

MR. PETER TOURNALIN was sitting, or rather lying, in a steamer-chair, on the first-class saloon-deck of the P. and O. ship *Boomerang*, which had not been many days as yet on the voyage home from Sydney. He had been trying to read; but it was a hot morning, and the curry, of which he had partaken freely at breakfast, had made him feel a little heavy and disinclined for mental exertion just then, particularly as Buckle's *History of Civilization*, the first volume of which he had brought

8 Conrmalin's Time Cheques.

up from the ship's library, is not exactly light literature at any time.

He wanted distraction of some sort, but he could not summon up sufficient energy to rise and pace the deck, as his only acquaintance on board, a Mr. Perkins, was doing with a breezy vigor which Tourmalin found himself feebly resenting.

Another alternative was open to him, it is true: not far away were other deck-chairs, in which some of the lady passengers were reading, writing, and chatting more or less languidly. There were not very many on board -for it was autumn, a time at which homewardbound vessels are not apt to be crowded -but even in that small group there were one or two with whom it might have seemed possible to pass a little time in a pleasant and profitable manner. For instance, there was that tall, graceful girl in the navy-blue skirt, and the striped cotton blouse confined at her slender waist by a leathern belt. (Tourmalin, it should be mentioned, was in the habit of noticing the details of feminine costume.) She had regular features, gray eyes which lighted up whenever she spoke, and an expression of