

**THE LAST
MEETING; A STORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649400874

The last meeting; a story by Brander Matthews

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THE LAST MEETING

A STORY

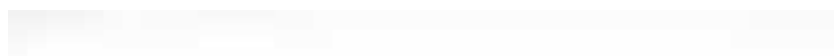
BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1885

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THE LAST MEETING.

CHAPTER I.

FREDERICK OLYPHANT.

THERE are not wanting those willing to abuse the climate of New York, but even the most vindictive of these, after declaring that the cold of winter, the dust of spring and the heat of summer are alike intolerable, finds himself constrained to confess that there is nothing to be said against the few brief weeks of delight which intervene after the hot spells of the African summer and before the cold snaps of the Arctic winter. In these rich and mellow days of the Fall—to use the good old English word often ignorantly miscalled an Americanism—the air is both balmy and bracing; and the joy of living, the mere animal pleasure of existence, is the portion of every healthy man as he takes his walks abroad. This season is not the mild and enervating Indian summer which may sometimes

follow it after a frost or two ; it is the Fall as it is seen at its best along the Atlantic coast, after it has begun to paint the trees and the vines in ruddy colors which recall the war-paint of the departed inhabitants of these shores. It is the season of perfect bodily felicity, when men return to town, rested and refreshed and ready to buckle to their winter's work.

On the afternoon of a day toward the end of October, a day which was a sample of the very best the clerk of the weather can offer to his American customers, Mr. Frederick Olyphant, a young artist, left his studio, in an odd little building just back of Tenth Street, and, passing through a dim alley way into the quiet side-street worn by the feet of three generations of the artists of New York, turned toward Fifth Avenue, pausing only to glance at the clock in the picturesque tower of the Jefferson-Market Court-house. There was a little tang to the wind as he walked briskly to the corner and started up town. He was going to Mrs. Sutton's, who, that afternoon, was *At Home, Tea at Four O'Clock*. It was almost the first tea of the season. As a rule, Frederick Olyphant disliked teas, but at Mrs. Sutton's he hoped to meet Miss Winifred Marshall, with whom he was in love, and who had promised to marry him.

Frederick Olyphant was as handsome and as manly a young American as one could have

found in a walk from Central Park to the Battery. There was an air of resolute self-reliance about him. He had clean and clear-cut features; his eyes were deep brown; he wore a full beard trimmed squarely below his chin, and a dark brown mustache curled away from his upper lip. The American and the stranger within his gates are alike ready to praise the beauty of American women, a beauty as lovely in its bloom as it is fragile and fleeting, though it is gaining sturdiness and lasting longer every year, now that American girls live more in the open air and are borrowing the common-sense notions and the healthful habits of English women. But less, indeed, one may say little, is heard about the good looks of American men, although they are almost as much deserving of comment. There is character in the face of an American, and a student of human nature who should stand in Broadway taking notes need complain of no monotony of feature. Now and again he would see a face which might have been painted by one of the great Venetians: there is the same shrewdness, elevation, and mercantile nobility—for New York, like Venice, is a city by the sea, and her merchants are princes. There are young men, too, whose faces are prophetic of the future of the New World—young men whose faces are lighted by hope and strengthened by determination; young men in whose eyes can be seen