

The Way We Live Now (Annotated)



Augustus Melmotte is a foreign-born financier with a mysterious past (he is rumored to have Jewish origins, and it is later revealed that he owned a failed bank in Munich). When he moves his business and his family to London, the city's upper crust begins buzzing with rumors about him and a host of characters ultimately find their lives changed because of him. Melmotte sets up his office in the City of London and he purchases a fine house in Grosvenor Square. He sets out to woo rich and powerful investors by hosting a lavish party, and finds an appropriate investment vehicle when he is approached by a young engineer, Paul Montague, and his American partner, Hamilton K. Fisker, to invest in the construction of a new railway line running from Salt Lake City to Veracruz, Mexico. Melmotte's goal is to ramp up the share price without paying out any actual money into the scheme itself, thereby increasing his own not-inconsiderable wealth. Amongst the aristocratic investors on the railway schemes board is Sir Felix Carbury, a young and dissolute baronet who is quickly running through his widowed mother's savings. In an attempt to restore their fortunes, as they are being beset by their creditors, his mother, Lady Matilda Carbury, who makes ends meet by writing historical potboilers with titles like *Criminal Queens: Powerful Women* as the *Playthings of Love* endeavors to have him become engaged to Marie Melmotte, the Melmottes only child and a considerable heiress in her own right. Sir Felix manages to win Marie's heart, but his schemes are blocked by Melmotte, who has no intention of allowing his daughter to marry a penniless aristocrat. Felix's situation is also complicated by his relationship with Ruby Ruggles, a buxom young farm girl living with her grandfather on the estate of Roger Carbury, his well-off cousin. Whilst Melmotte is carrying out his financial

shenanigans, Paul Montague is the one person who is a thorn in his side. In the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway Board meetings, chaired and controlled by Melmotte, it is Paul who raises the difficult questions of when the money will actually be allocated to the railway line. Pauls personal life is also made complicated by his amorous affairs. He falls in love with Lady Carburys young and beautiful daughter Hettamuch to her mothers furybut has been followed to England by a former American fiancée, the dashing Mrs Winifred Hurtle. Mrs Hurtle is determined to make Paul marry her based on the fact that they had lived together in America, and that she offered him all that a woman can give. It is Lady Carburys plan, advised by her literary friend Mr Broune, a distinguished London publisher, for Hetta to marry her cousin Roger. Roger has been Pauls mentor and the two start to come into conflict over their attentions towards Hetta, who steadfastly refuses to marry her cousin, against her mothers wishes. Events start to come to a head when Paul finally gets Mrs Hurtles consent to free him of his obligations towards her, in exchange for agreeing to spend one final weekend with her on the coast. Whilst walking along the sands, they meet Roger Carbury, who, on seeing Paul with another woman, decides to break off all acquaintance with him, believing that Paul is simply playing with Hettas affections. In the meantime, Felix Carbury is torn between his affection for Ruby and his financial need to pursue Marie Melmotte. Ruby, after being beaten by her grandfather for not marrying a respectable local miller, John Crumb, runs away to London and finds refuge in the boarding house owned by her aunt, Mrs Pipkinwhere, as it happens, Mrs Hurtle is lodging. Felix learns from Ruby about Mrs Hurtles relationship with Paul and, coming into conflict with Mrs Hurtle over his attentions to Ruby, reveals all his new-found knowledge to his mother and sister. Hetta is devastated and breaks off her engagement to Paul. Includes a biography of the Author

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